

**CIHM  
Microfiche  
Series  
(Monographs)**

**ICMH  
Collection de  
microfiches  
(monographies)**



**Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques**

**© 1996**

## Technical and Bibliographic Notes / Notes technique et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming are checked below.

L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modifications dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

- Coloured covers / Couverture de couleur
- Covers damaged / Couverture endommagée
- Covers restored and/or laminated / Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée
- Cover title missing / Le titre de couverture manque
- Coloured maps / Cartes géographiques en couleur
- Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black) / Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)
- Coloured plates and/or illustrations / Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur
- Bound with other material / Relié avec d'autres documents
- Only edition available / Seule édition disponible
- Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin / La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distorsion le long de la marge intérieure.
- Blank leaves added during restorations may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming / Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.
- Additional comments / Commentaires supplémentaires:

- Coloured pages / Pages de couleur
- Pages damaged / Pages endommagées
- Pages restored and/or laminated / Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées
- Pages discoloured, stained or foxed / Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées
- Pages detached / Pages détachées
- Showthrough / Transparence
- Quality of print varies / Qualité inégale de l'impression
- Includes supplementary material / Comprend du matériel supplémentaire
- Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image / Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.
- Opposing pages with varying colouration or discolourations are filmed twice to ensure the best possible image / Les pages s'opposant ayant des colorations variables ou des décolorations sont filmées deux fois afin d'obtenir la meilleur image possible.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below/  
Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

	10X		14X		18X		22X		26X		30X
	12X		16X		20X		24X		28X		32X

(Note: The 20X cell in the above grid contains a checkmark.)

The copy filmed here has been reproduced thanks to the generosity of:

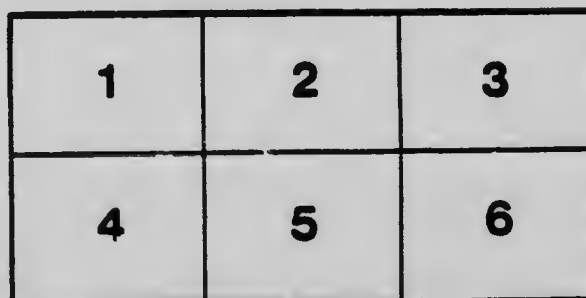
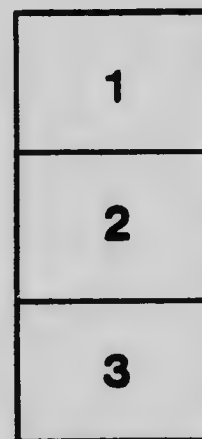
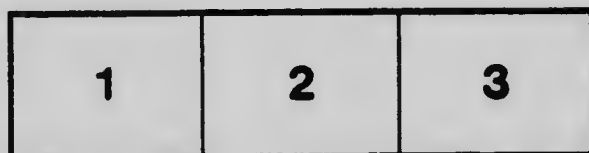
National Library of Canada

The images appearing here are the best quality possible considering the condition and legibility of the original copy and in keeping with the filming contract specifications.

Original copies in printed paper covers are filmed beginning with the front cover and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression, or the back cover when appropriate. All other original copies are filmed beginning on the first page with a printed or illustrated impression, and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression.

The last recorded frame on each microfiche shall contain the symbol  $\rightarrow$  (meaning "CONTINUED"), or the symbol  $\nabla$  (meaning "END"), whichever applies.

Maps, plates, charts, etc., may be filmed at different reduction ratios. Those too large to be entirely included in one exposure are filmed beginning in the upper left hand corner, left to right and top to bottom, as many frames as required. The following diagrams illustrate the method:



L'exemplaire filmé fut reproduit grâce à la générosité de:

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Les images suivantes ont été reproduites avec le plus grand soin, compte tenu de la condition et de la netteté de l'exemplaire filmé, et en conformité avec les conditions du contrat de filmage.

Les exemplaires originaux dont la couverture en papier est imprimée sont filmés en commençant par le premier plat et en terminant soit par la dernière page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration, soit par le second plat, selon le cas. Tous les autres exemplaires originaux sont filmés en commençant par la première page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration et en terminant par la dernière page qui comporte une telle empreinte.

Un des symboles suivants apparaîtra sur la dernière image de chaque microfiche, selon le cas: le symbole  $\rightarrow$  signifie "A SUIVRE", le symbole  $\nabla$  signifie "FIN".

Les cartes, planches, tableaux, etc., peuvent être filmés à des taux de réduction différents. Lorsque le document est trop grand pour être reproduit en un seul cliché, il est filmé à partir de l'angle supérieur gauche, de gauche à droite, et de haut en bas, en prenant le nombre d'images nécessaire. Les diagrammes suivants illustrent la méthode.

# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



4.5

5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10

11.2

12.5

14

16

18

20

22.5

25

28

32

36

40

45

50

56

63

71

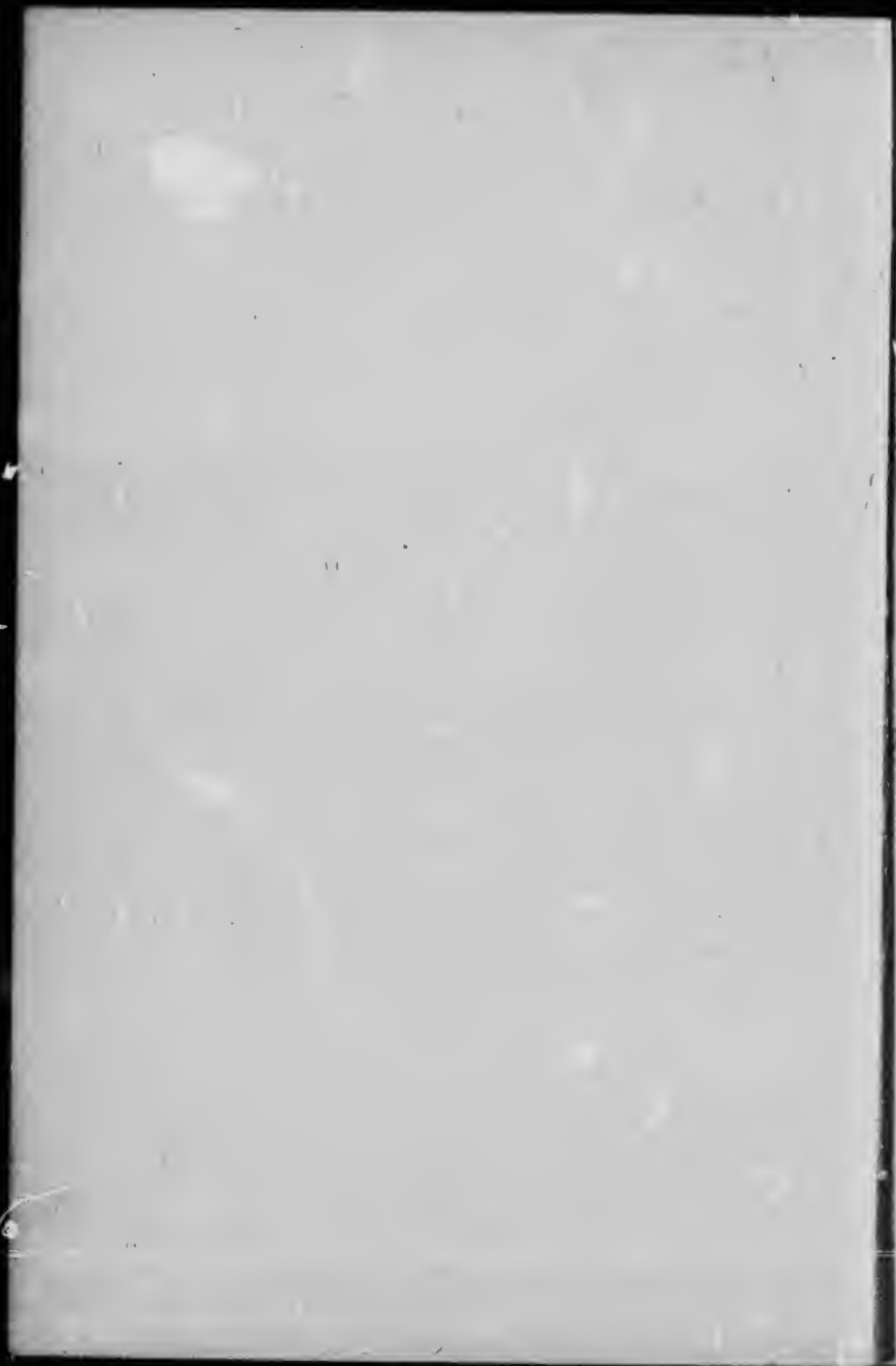
80

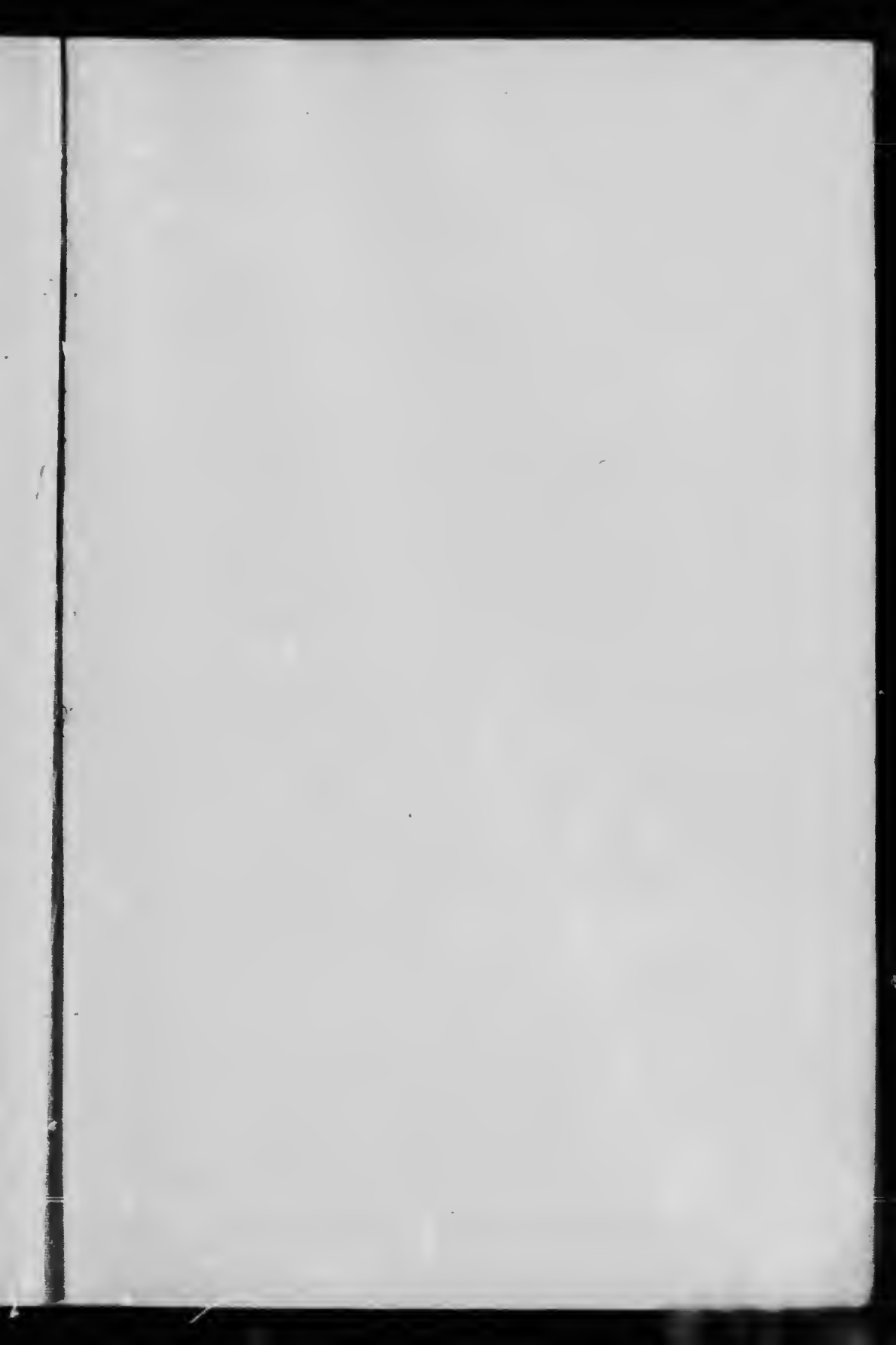


**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482-0300 - Phone  
(716) 288-5989 - Fax

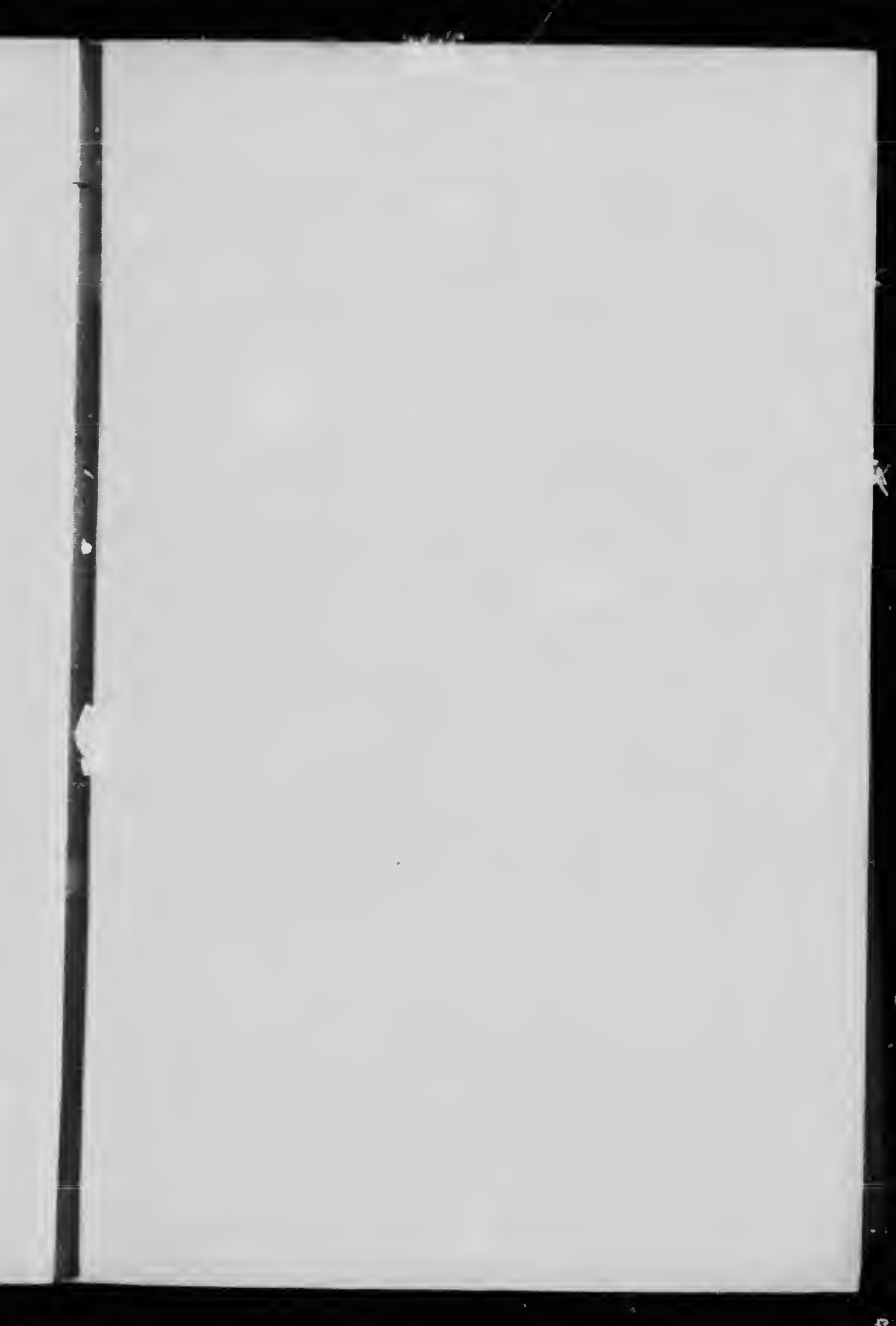
Good Morning Glory,  
How do you do, Drop.  
Goodnight Shirt.  
E.E.M.P.

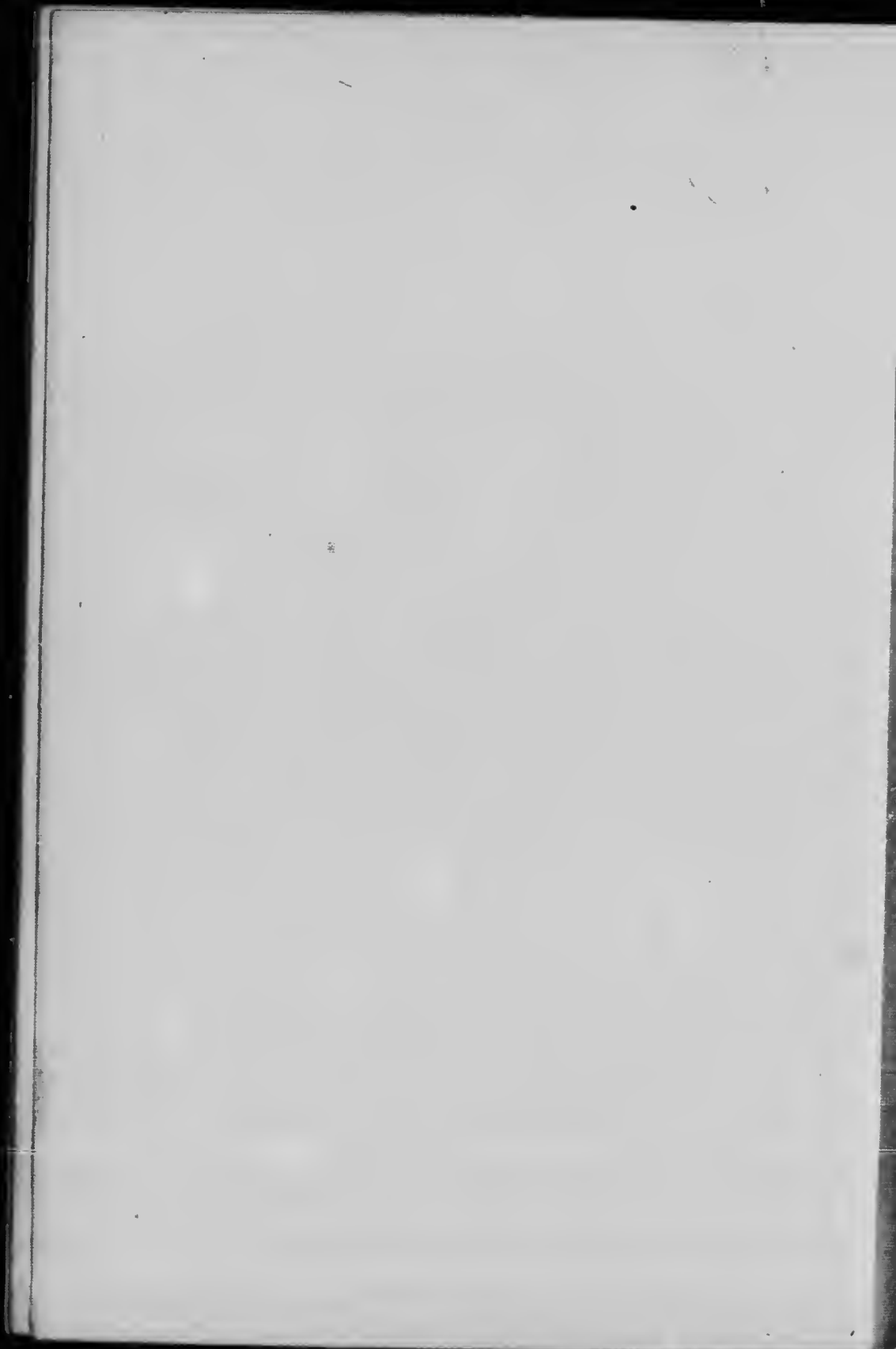




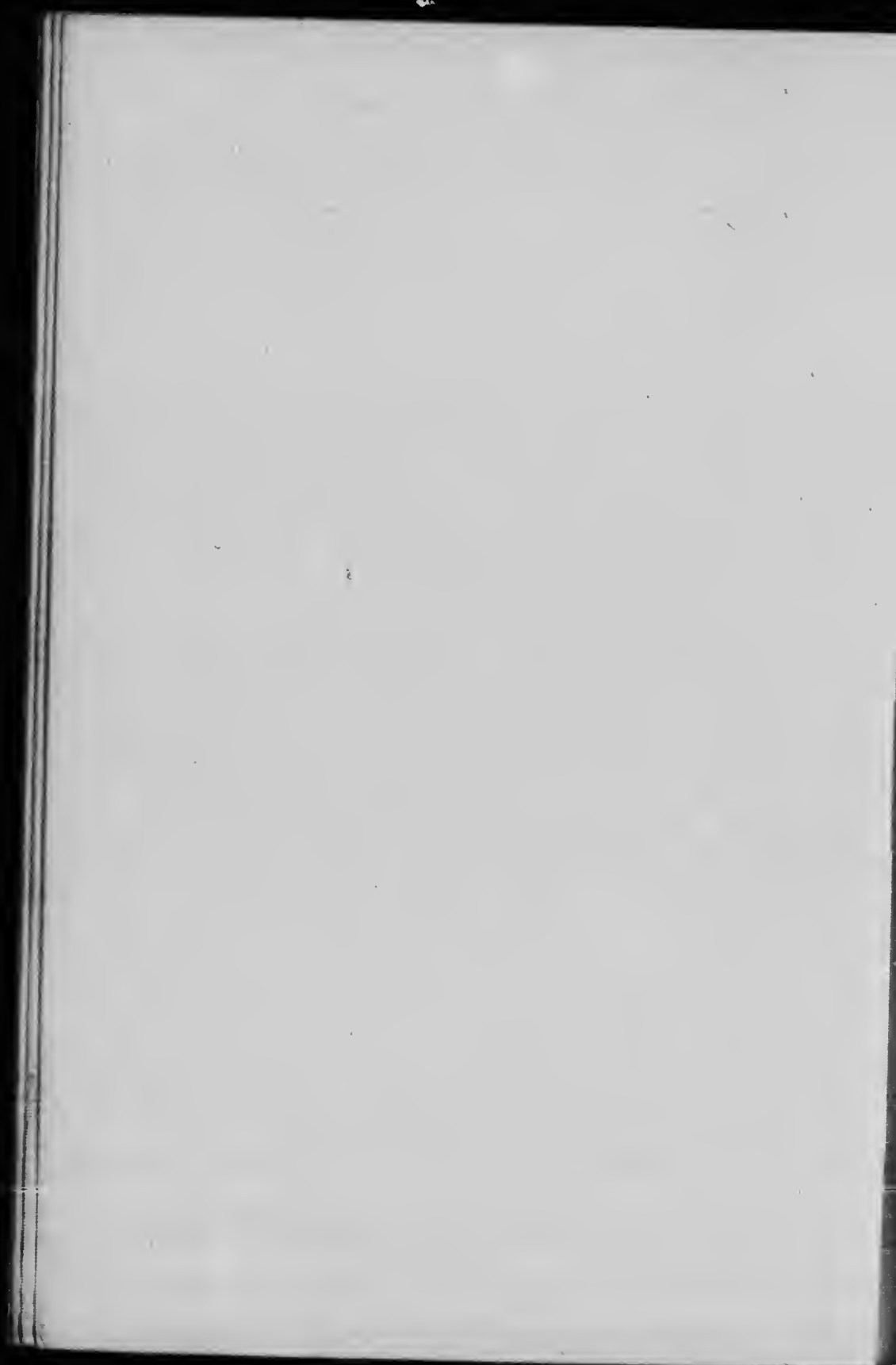








THE EXPLOITS OF  
BILGE AND MA



**THE EXPLOITS OF  
BILGE AND MA**

**BY**

**PETER CLARK MACFARLANE**

**TORONTO**

**McCLELLAND AND STEWART**

**1919**

PS 3525  
A225  
E96  
1919  
P\*\*\*

*Copyright, 1919,*

BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

*All rights reserved*

Published, October, 1919

**Norwood Press**

Set up and electrotyped by J. S. Cushing Co., Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.  
Presswork by S. J. Parkhill & Co., Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

09500200

TO THE RANKS AND RATINGS OF THE  
UNITED STATES NAVY,--  
BRAVE, COMPETENT, KINDLY, AND, ABOVE  
EVERYTHING ELSE, LOYAL,--  
THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
BY THE AUTHOR





## FOREWORD

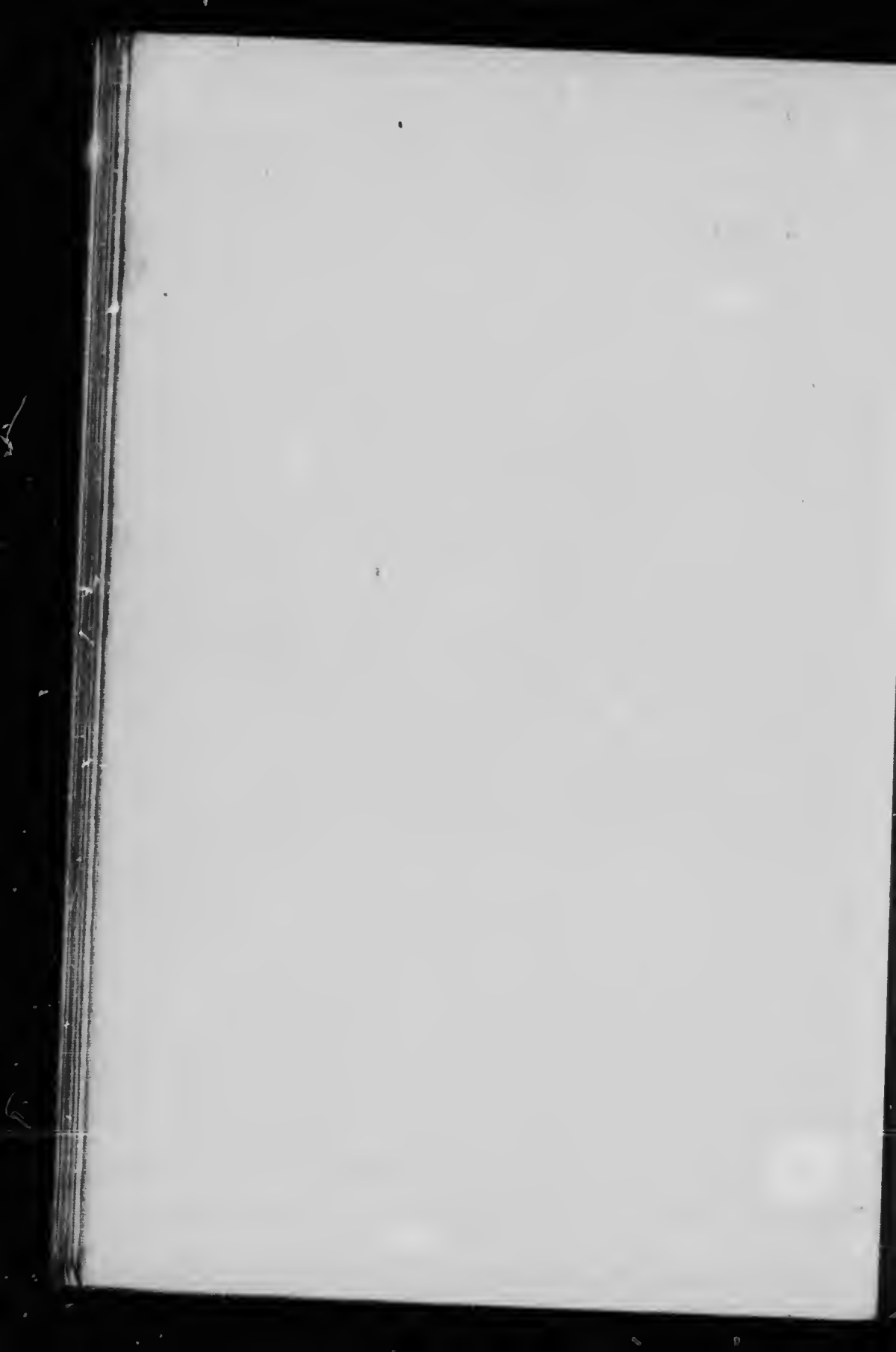
I HAVE read with interest these stories of the exploits of "Bilge" and "Ma," two fiction characters who are supposed to have lived and moved on one of the destroyer flotillas under my command in the late war. The author's own experience upon and around these craft when they were engaged in hunting the submarine has acquainted him with the atmosphere in which that work was done, and in the mishaps as well as in the achievements of the heroes whose adventures are set forth in these pages he has portrayed something of that playful spirit, that dare-devil courage and that unfaltering tenacity of purpose which I have always seen to be characteristic of the American fighting man afloat. I shall anticipate that the volume may not only prove entertaining reading to all who care for a yarn of the sea, but that it will be recognized by officers and men of the fleet and their friends as a tribute to the personnel and the character of the Navy as a whole.

WM. S. SIMS,  
*Rear-Admiral, U. S. Navy.*



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD . . . . .	vii
I THE MISTAKES OF BILGE . . . . .	I
II BILGE AND THE "Q" BOAT . . . . .	55
III KIDNAPING CUPID . . . . .	103
IV BILGE AND MA GET A SUB . . . . .	163
V FOR TWO ORPHANS . . . . .	200
VI LONDON LEAVE . . . . .	242



# THE EXPLOITS OF BILGE AND MA

## I

### THE MISTAKES OF BILGE

"WHOSE idea?" grumbled the chief boson's mate suspiciously.

"What difference, so long's it's a good idea?" argued the bunting tosser, otherwise the signal man. "They've got four hams; they've got six three-foot loaves of bread; they've got ten pounds of butter; they've got two gallons of dill pickles; they've got a can of U. S. corned beef; they've got a can of marmalade and two of jam; and the cook is makin' pies — two or three dozen of 'em."

"Pies? Where'd he get the makin's?"

"It's easy enough to figure where he got the makin's, seeing there's cans of California apricots and Delaware peaches in the storeroom."

"To be issued only on —" reflected a gunner's mate.

"On orders," admitted the bunting tosser; "but what's orders to a ship's cook when you get on the right side of him? And that bunch is sure on the right side of one Filipino."

"I ain't tasted a real peach pie since — since —" reminisced the chief boson hungrily; and his voice

## 2 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

trailed off into nothingness as he tried in vain to fix the date.

"There's goin' to be refreshment too — liquid refreshment," sighed Spud Alexander, chief water tender.

"Ice cream, I suppose," derided the boson.

"Bottled refreshment," illumined the signal man.

"Everybody chipped in a pound note. Bilge Kennedy and Packy are ashore now rounding it up."

"Bilge Kennedy? Is that clown goin'?" Then I don't!" announced the chief boson with conviction.

"He'll jazz up everything."

"You ain't been invited to go, Steve, have you?" inquired Spud rather indelicately.

"You have, I s'pose," retorted the boson.

"That's what I'm sore about; I ain't," admitted Spud.

"Well, you're not a-goin' to miss nothing on that account," solaced the jaundiced boson; "for I tell you now that if Bilge Kennedy is along the whole push'll come back under guard. Bilge is half crazy to begin with, and two bottles of soda water will put him off his nut for a week."

"They're figuring on five hundred bottles," dilated the burting tosser, who appeared to have the commissary statistics of the expedition at his tongue's end.

"Of soda water?" inquired the boson in real alarm. "They'll bust. No mere twenty-eight human bodies can stand that much air pressure."

"Grape juice," explained the signal man — every form of beverage that is not tea, coffee, chocolate, milk or water being officially designated as grape juice in the Navy now.

"It'll be this Irish ale, most likely," suggested Spud; "and the bottles are little and mostly froth. They don't hold a glass hardly, and lately these graspin' landlords has got to filling 'em half full of water. It's practically a straight temperance drink."

The chief boson's lips twitched nervously. "St...," he decided virtuously — "still I wouldn't go along, not if they asked me to, if that bat Bilge Kennedy has anything to do with it at all."

"The whole thing's a frost," agreed Spud, "with Kennedy in it."

"Packy's another nut," added the bunting tosser.

"Five hundred bottles!" ruminated the chief boson. "Somebody ought to know about that."

"They are likely to," said Spud with a self-convinced air. "It's nothing less than inviting international complications to let that bunch ashore like this."

The chief boson's mouth worked silently. He was reflecting on the alleged five hundred bottles and feeling at the same time how thick and parched was the fuzzy integument on the top of his tongue, but he emerged from his deliberations to declare finally: "I wouldn't go out with that crew to-day, not for no money!"

"Same here!" growled an embittered chorus.

Nevertheless when, one hour later, twenty-eight self-selected men from the destroyer piled over the side and into the motor sailer, accompanied by one self-important Filipino who was keeping a watchful eye upon certain and sundry oddly shaped bales and hampers, every one of the threescore and ten men of her complement who had not been invited lined the guard wire — destroyers having no rail — to cast

## 4           The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

down envious longing eyes, and to indulge in stinging gibes of one sort and another.

"Here's a copy of their sailing orders," snickered the bunting tosser, producing a typewritten manifold copy. "I pinched it off the yeoman's desk."

A group of the envious bent over the document, which read as follows:

U. S. S. \_\_\_\_\_

### SECRET SAILING ORDERS No. 23

FORCES: The Self-Entertainment Society.

Be under way on Saturday, 11th May, 1918, in order to be in front of Mrs. Murphy's, Lynch Quay, by 10 A.M. When two blocks south of Murphy's form column. Speed 2 knots. Course will be signaled by escort commander.

This force will escort fast Private Yacht to Secret Rendezvous near cove.

Maneuver to bring Yacht into port shortly before lunch time.

After meeting convoy escort will zigzag ahead of convoy unless fog or darkness sets in and makes it impracticable.

In case of shortage of fuel the Escort Commander will signal by W. T. for the fuel barge in charge of Coxswain Stumborg to come alongside and replenish.

Return to port under cover of darkness, zigzagging if necessary.

In case of breakdown escort will be furnished.

If there should be a submarine attack do not send S O S for patrol.

During the course of the day a select entertainment will be furnished by the ship's Jazz Band, led



by Ducky Wellman, whose fame in *The Dance of the Fairies* is well known. Grape juice and song; pickles, sandwiches and other vegetables will furnish the menu.

"Chief Yeoman Newman, he got that up, huh!" observed Spud scornfully. "And I suppose he figures that's funny."

"It is — kind of, to us destroyer gobs," admitted the bunting tosser wistfully.

"Funny or not, it's Bilge Kennedy that'll crab their game for 'em!" declared the chief boson as he turned and went below.

Which was evidence particular that the chief boson was a very cantankerous and ill-dispositioned person, because as a matter of simple justice it must be stated at once that Bilge Kennedy was not the desperate and unreliable party that the chief boson had described. On the contrary, Bilge was a chief machinist's mate, which fact of itself attested a certain stability of character. In a personal way Bilge rated a raft of red hair, huge splotches of freckles, a blue and guileless eye, and a full-toothed smile calculated to disarm all but the most venomous of critics. It is safe also to add that Bilge was not the name wherewith his mother had him fondly christened in infancy, just as it is also safe to affirm that with what name or initials he had been at that time endowed no one on the ship could have told save only the chief yeoman, already referred to, who handled the muster rolls.

Bilge's outstanding characteristic was an amiable disposition to assume guardianship over any company in which he found himself cast, and one result

## 6 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

of the manner in which certain elements had been compounded in his nature was that a certain few always accepted such guardianship gratefully, while a certain much larger number inevitably rejected it scornfully. The Self-Entertainment Society, but last night organized, consisted of those persons on board the ship who accepted Bilge, and their loyalty to him was as pronounced as the antipathy of those who rejected him.

Bilge as a leader was gifted with a certain fertility of resource and innocently obsessed by the notion that he was clever. On this day of days the usual crisis rose and came to a head early, with Bilge functioning promptly; and if the strategy he resorted to produced after-complications more grave than the situation they were devised to escape, it was doubtless Bilge whose mental sufferings were keenest in consequence, though the physical sufferings and the crown of glory alike devolved upon a boson's mate of the widely advertised name of Ford. Ford had enlisted from the pronouncedly male state of Texas, but because of the meek expression of his features and some fancied maternal note in his character he staggered under the female sobriquet of Ma. His mates, when they remembered it, tried to be consistent by referring to Ma with the appropriate feminine pronouns as "she" or "her"; but a good deal of the time they forgot, which was easy, because Ma had some distinctively masculine traits.

The picnic party had executed the first half of its sailing orders and unloaded itself and its commissary supplies upon a pebbly beach in the edge of a tiny cove under the lee of a pine-clad hill, when the crisis already hinted at approached in the form

of a stubby oranglike figure, carrying a stout blackthorn and wearing a stiff black beard that was like a blacking brush bent under his chin, the rest of his bony face being smoothly shaven.

"Ye'll be getting aff the strand as fast as ever ye can!" barked a voice that was brash and unpleasant.

An instant solemnity of silence seized upon the flock of skylarking young men in blue uniforms and flat-topped navy hats. They looked up from almost as many different occupations and diversions as there were men, and asked sharply, not liking the tone:

"What's that?"

"I say ye'll be getting aff the strand!" barked the gloomy interloper, planting both heels aggressively.

"Off the strand?"

"He means the beach!"

"His Lordship allows no picnic parties."

"His Lordship?"

"Lord Lallyskallen."

"Does his Ludship own the beach?" inquired Seaman Wart Kessler politely.

"He owns the hill," deposed the person with the blackthorn.

"But we are not on the hill."

"But ye will be presently," was argued impatiently. "'Tis easy enough to see that ye'll soon be all over the place. Sure and there's a man on the hill now. He's drinkin' out of the spring. He's fetchin' water from the spring." These specifications, allegations and accusations followed each other excitedly.

"Will it hurt the spring to bring water from it?" inquired Willie Lewis blandly.

## 8 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

"Ye have no right —"

"A spring is to bring water from, isn't it?" inquired several tormenting young men at once, as about this time the entire group, scenting diversion in this interruption of their innocent hilarities, surrounded the newcomer suddenly, encompassing and all but smothering him in the crowd embrace.

"Where'd you get the whiskers, Mike?" remarked Oiler McIntyre, sociably inquisitive.

"Me name is Patrick O'Mahony," he announced firmly, "and I tell ye ye cannot picnic here. Shove aff!"

Willie Lewis, having a hand like an automatic car coupler, lightly gathered in the blackthorn, viewed it for a moment with an admiring eye and passed it coolly about for inspection. "Gaze on that natural crook, fellows," he directed, "and feel of them bumps. Couldn't you everlastingly paralyze a guy with that? If you'd a had that with you in Cork that night, Packy, the course of history might have run different."

Patrick, meanwhile, was nonplused. His heart had grown faint at the mere feel of this young sailor's grip, and he knew that he had been coolly disarmed, but by a man with a smiling eye. He perceived that these good-natured young animals meant him no harm beyond disobedience to his mandate; yet disobedience was treason. Patrick's cheek flamed.

"His Lordship —" he sputtered, and floundered for a word.

This was Bilge's moment — one of those for which he was born into the world.

"Ever taste grape juice?" he inquired diplomat-

ically, shouldering off the bunch and confronting Patrick squarely.

Patrick estimated Bilge with suspicious, half-recognizant eye, as if he thought this red-haired, freckled, large-toothed person might have escaped from the same zoo as himself. In this moment Bilge swept from under a newspaper in a basket a small black bottle about the size and shape of a ketchup bottle at home, but as to color black as the growth on Patrick's chin. With his strong young teeth the sailor nipped the cover off and proffered it.

Patrick contemplated the bubbling froth for the quarter of a second that duty still stood bright and shining before his eye, then weakly surrendered. He took one experimental sip, held off the bottle and gazed at it meditatively, with one eye closed tight and the other unusually large and thoughtful.

"It tastes like Irish ale," he decided.

"Grape juice," insisted Bilge.

Pat smacked his lips and lifted the bottle again, this time with an air of determination, to an angle of sixty-five degrees while his occiput sank to the thick folds at the back of his neck. From somewhere throatward or bottleward proceeded a gurgling sound.

"I didn't know anything could run out of a bottle that fast," remarked Willie Lewis, awestruck.

Patrick took down the bottle at length and contemplated it with an expression of distress.

"What's the matter with it?" inquired Bilge.

"It's empty," accused Patrick.

Bilge smiled comprehendingly, and swept up from under the paper in the basket another bottle of the same size and appearance, except that this one bore

## 10      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

a label. Patrick reached for it eagerly, but paused to contemplate the label, again with that one-eyed glance which in his habit appeared to be necessary to mental concentration — contemplated it and smiled, as if he had detected an amiable subterfuge.

"'Tis brewed in Cork," he chuckled.

"The Navy has it made in Cork," assured Bilge solemnly, "and puts the label on it to remind the boys of the good old times when they was drinking Irish ale instead of grape juice."

Patrick put the bottle to his lips and went through the head-tipping process again.

"The head of your Navy must be a gr-r-reat man," he decided with a smack as he lowered the empty bottle.

"He is," affirmed Bilge with very real conviction. "The best friend the enlisted man ever had."

"I read he had a son in the Navy."

"Hist!" said Bilge. "This is his son." And with sudden inspiration, though not necessarily divine, he jerked a thumb toward Wart Kessler.

"Ye don't mean it!" whispered Pat, turning to gaze open-mouthed and one-eyed at Wart, who was by way of being a natural comedian.

Having this day dragged out from the recesses of his ditty box a Scotch tammie cap, memento of a night in Glasgow, Wart had now rolled his trousers up to reveal a pair of bare knees, and by the expedient of turning two sailors' buff storm coats inside out and tying one by the arms of it, back first, about his waist to form kilts, and the other by the same means about his neck to suggest a highland cape, had transformed himself into a caricature of a Scotch laird, and with Yeoman Newman's walking

stick now strutted to and fro in character, pointing out details on the landscape, asking questions, and proposing to buy himself this likely-looking manor house or that one, while the crowd of his mates gawped or guffawed, at the same time mincing attendance on him after a fashion that to a person of any imagination might have been supposed to suggest the real relation between a laird and his retinue.

And Patrick, it appeared, was a person of real imagination. He gazed long and ardently till the features of the none too handsome Wart must have been impressed upon his very soul.

"Faith and ye're right! 'Tis the ver' son of the Sicretry himself," he decided.

"Sit down," suggested Bilge artfully, still intent upon wiping out utterly Patrick's objection to the use of this particular bit of beach and hillside as a picnic ground.

Patrick, using the blackthorn, which had been returned to him as his manner became more pacific, eased his gnarled joints downward to the grass as it sloped toward the beach, and sat bolt upright, with his short legs thrust straight out in front of him at an angle of about sixty degrees, which angle Bilge thoughtfully populated with a heap of those small black bottles. Bilge's next act of hospitality was to sit down beside Pat and fall into confidential chat, their two backs to the picnic party, which, having tired of playing ape to Wart, had swung to the other extreme by preparing hilariously to lynch the said comedian as an oppressive Irish landlord.

"Is it true, so be, that there's millionaires' sons among the enlisted men of the United States

12      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

Navy?" inquired Patrick directly, acquiring an increasing respect for and interest in his hosts with every bottle he consumed.

"Oh, some," admitted Bilge conservatively, but again unable to resist temptation. "Of course the jackies ain't all that kind, but there's probably a millionaire to each ship. Some ships have got more. Ours has got three."

"Ye don't mean it!" gasped Patrick, shifting his features to a one-eyed contemplation of the preparations for the hanging without as yet comprehending their significance, and studying the entire company with renewed interest.

"Yonder — yonder's a millionaire," said Bilge, casting a pebble toward innocent Jimmie Roser, a modest, retiring boy, whose dark handsome face, romantic air, and the particularly new suit of blues he happened to be wearing suggested to Bilge the possibility of such affluence.

"By ol' S'n' Patrick!" murmured the great saint's namesake, sighting along the nose of the bottle. "Yon lad's a millionaire, hey?"

"Name's Armour," specified Bilge.

Patrick addressed himself to his refreshment again, but suddenly the bottle came down and he reached out with his cane and tickled the name of Armour on the can of corned beef which lay atop the heap of stores.

"Him?" he asked, freshly floored, for Patrick recalled having seen that name frequently on tins in grocers' shops.

Bilge nodded, swallowing quickly.

"Do ye tell me that now?" Patrick was struggling with wonder.



"Sure thing," observed Bilge, able now to command a casual air. "This is young Armour."

Patrick forgot his frothy little bottle in gazing at Armour; and then "Who's the others?" he demanded abruptly.

Bilge gazed meditatively over his flock to see upon whom he should next confer the responsibilities of great wealth.

"Begob! They're hanging the Sicrotry's son!" exclaimed Patrick, starting up in amazement.

"It's only a joke," assured Bilge. "They'll cut him down before he comes to the last gasp. At least they always have heretofore. It's a way they have of hazin' the young man to keep him down and remind him that this is a democratic Navy of ours."

"'Tis a great Navy that ye have, you Yankees," agreed Patrick complimentarily. "But who's these other millionaires?"

"Well, yonder — yonder's one of 'em — that tall guy making the sandwiches."

"A millionaire makin' the sandwiches!" gasped Patrick. "For the love of Mike now, would ye believe that if ye seen it with yer own eyes even? What's his name?"

"Astor. That's young Astor. You've heard of the Astors. He's got an uncle or something that's been made an English peer or knight or some such."

Patrick's one-eyed gaze was carefully appraising the facial assets of Gunner's Mate Richard Dorgan, busy with the making of sandwiches, and quite unaware of the possession of great wealth.

"Who's the other?" insisted Patrick suddenly, as if determined to get the business of identifying these young millionaires over with once and for all.

14      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

Bilge hesitated, with roving eye, then got a sudden inspiration and contrived an embarrassed cough and blush. Patrick, thoroughly *en rapport*, now understood at once.

"You?" he demanded, and abruptly sat himself a few inches farther away, lest he contaminate a millionaire with touching of his barn-smelling garments.

"My father don't exactly rate as a millionaire," deposed Bilge quite truthfully; but departed entirely from truth as he carried on with the intimation: "He's probably not worth a penny over eight hundred thousand, but they call us three the millionaire trio — Armour and Astor and me."

Patrick, with that single thinking eye, contemplated each of the three in turn, and finally noted once more the Secretary's son, who, after having been snapped in a most undignified position by a camera, had finally been lowered to the hillside and was now engaged with his teeth upon the knots in the rope with which his tormentors had left him still bound.

"I must be after leavin'," he said, popping up as if some new idea had seized him violently.

"You're not mad or anything?" inquired Bilge, solicitous lest he had somehow carried things too far.

"I am not that," declared Patrick sincerely. "Ye're a very foine man, Mister —"

"Kennedy's my name."

"Mr. Kennedy! And all yer friends is foine men; and ye have His Lordship's permission to stay here as long as ye loike, and have as much sport as ye loike. I bid ye a verra respectful good day."

"Wait!" commanded Bilge, and hospitably stuffed the two jacket pockets and the two hip pockets of Patrick's nondescript trousers so that he clinked as he walked and was obliged to proceed circumspectly, feeling carefully of one bulging protuberance upon his person after another, lest some bottle's mooring give way and catastrophe overtake him.

Bilge saw Patrick depart with a feeling of large satisfaction and the flattering unction that once again his genial diplomacy had triumphed. That the lies he had lightly told to Patrick would presently return to discomfit him Bilge had not the slightest suspicion. That they would get him into what was at once the most delightful and the most painfully embarrassing situation he had ever faced was an idea that naturally could not have occurred to him; but that they did so was later recorded by Bilge in a letter to his friend Ben, in the battleship fleet — that Ben who, in those far-off days before the war, had been bunkie with Bilge on the United States Steamer *San Diego*, a good ship but ancient as fighting ships go, and one which the men in her irreverently but lovingly called "the old prune barge."

Because in order to do Bilge full justice it is necessary that he should be permitted to interpret the succeeding events himself, the latter portion of that letter, just as the writer painfully picked it out on Yeoman Newman's typewriter, is here spread upon the record.

And so, Ben, back come this two-eyed gink with the trick of lookin at you with only one of em, a-bringin this letter — white stiff paper with some

kind of a trade-mark scroll of lions and a horse with one horn in his face on the top of it, and the writing this big square box-car style that looks like it's been done with a dolly bar.

"Lord Lallyskallen requires," it said, "the honor of the presence of Mr. Kennedy and his friends, Messrs. Daniels, Armour, Astor, and the other American sailors from the U. S. Destroyer \_\_\_\_\_, on his lawn this afternoon, where it will be His Lordship's pleasure to entertain them in such fashion as his wartime circumstances permit."

I read it out loud, and some of the boys groaned and some of em applauded. But not me, Ben. I was neutral.

"Trouble," croaks comedian Wart Kessler, alias the son of the Secretary, "trouble is done up in that white missive."

"We're havin' the time of our young lives, here by ourselves," argues Jew Dyckman. "Why let any old lord butt in and spoil the day for us?"

Naturally all this unanimity against the proposition turned me for it. If Wart and Jew was both against it that was primy-facy evidence that the scheme was all right.

But "His Lordship requires," I pointed out to em. "We got to go, gobs," I says, "or be darned impolite. They know which ship we're from," I says, "and how do you s'pose Captain Bradshaw's going to feel if he meets this Lord Lallyskallen sometime and he says —"

"Besides," argued young Astor, alias old Dick Dorgan, "I been wantin to go up against some of these Dukes and Lords sometime. Here's the chance."

"The main idea with me," elocuted Stuffy Meacham, "is that we might get something more to eat."

And it was a fact that the lunch had been all ate up. I never saw men gorge the way them gobs had gorged. We brought scoffins enough for the whole crew of our ship, instead of twenty-eight men, and I'm the sonofagun if they hadn't ate it all up before twelve o'clock; and here it was three now and everybody ravenin hungry.

"They might give us a feed," argued Stuffy again, kind of plaintive like. So we went.

"You gobs got to be careful now of your manners," I told em, "especially you three guys that I've wished fortune or family on. You that's been on a destroyer so long that you've forgot your manners, try and remember em. You that never had any manners try and dig up some. Like as not they might set us right down to a table or something, with cloth napkins and two forks, and a lot of fine ladies standin round waitin on us."

They swore to behave and they swore to obey me, which they halfway had to anyway, me being the only C. P. O. in the crowd. So I led em to it, guided by this old One-Eye. He had two eyes all right, but he did his most powerful lookin with only one of em; and he turned us over at the house to a sort of care-taker like, an old dodderin wreck of a man with one foot in the grave, with a skin that was so red every place you could see it that he must have sure been pink all over, that guy. The first stunt was showin us the castle, with the boys makin comments sott' voche.

"Looks kind of dingy," says little Case.

18      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

"I allow that she aint jest exactly bran new," admits Ma in that Texas drawl of hern.

"I don't get myself just right," says Bill Ehmke, lookin round kind of scary "Somethin is wrong here."

"Shut up," says Soapy Edwards, "and mooch along. Nothin's wrong here but you, Bill, and nobody aint goin to give you away."

So we followed this old salmon-fleshed guy round the house. It was a big long house. Pictures? I never seen such pictures, Ben. And there was swords and spears and guns hanging on the walls too. And the family plate! There was silver platters there as big as the drip pans in our engine room. There was silver ladles and silver punch bowls and silver goblets for drinkin out of and silver vawsses for flowers and — cut glass! Say, Ben, they had cut glass that run back to when you used to cut it by hand, and every durned little piece of it set out by itself on a little doily on a big mahogany table that you could see your face in just like a lookin-glass.

And there was a big piece of a kind of armor in the hall, that looked just like a man standin there, and it was when we were gawpin at that we seen the first of the real people. He was a young fellow with a light brown mustache that come skippin down the stairs in silk knee breeches, red silk stockings, big silver buckles on his shoes and a red velvet coat like Fred Stone used to wear in one of them coon dances.

"I'm the Earl of Skibberreen," he says, just as easy as you please, and you could tell he was the real thing, just to look at him. And he had a face like some of the pictures hanging on the walls. Well,

Ben, I retained my self-possession like I always do, and began presenting the fellows to him.

"This is Mr. Astor," I says, draggin Dorgan up.

"What is the name?" Dorg says, lookin blank but bracin up to do or die.

"Montmorency," the earl says, "is our family name. Reginald Montmorency is mine."

"Monty?" beamed Dorgan, clutchin wildly at straws and gettin one. "You're not Monty? Reginald Montmorency! Well, I should say!" gurgles Dorgan. "I've heard my brother speak of you hundreds of times since he came home from — Oxford, wasn't it?"

Reginald Montmorency's face lit up like Rube Emmonses when somebody mentions Great Bend, Kansas.

"Oxford, right-o!" he chuckles joyously.

Just then a girl come into the hall. It's funny, Ben, but most all the ideas you've got about Irish girls is colleens — blondes, you know — but there's another type. Black hair they've got, or nearly black, and more often than not it's wavy or kinky even. And these blackhaired girls have the bluest darned eyes you ever saw, kind of small round blue eyes that twinkle easy and natural like the stars, and they have rosy cheeks, and if you get one that their teeth is good they're some girl, believe me. But lots of the girls over here has bad teeth. The water, they lay it to, and I guess they're right, because Gatch — he's the Chief Engineer — won't leave us use it in our boilers, and no wonder it eats the casings off their ivories.

Well, this girl was that type, and her teeth was sound as a dollar. I sized that up the first smile.

"Mr. Kennedy," says the earl, "meet my sister, the Countess of Kildare," and he didn't introduce her to another soul but me; which was right and proper, considerin that I fell for her just like Spud Alexander fell down the ventilator that time on the old prune barge, you remember, heels over appetite; that's the way I fell; and she liked me too at the first glance, you could notice that all right.

"Aw, Mr. Kennedy!" she says, the first thing off; but just then my other responsibilities diverted me, for here was the young earl getting more and more enthusiastic every minute about our crowd.

"Rippin — perfectly rippin!" he says. "Aren't it, Pater?"

And there, by gum, was Pater, standin at the turn of the stair, and lookin more like the pictures on the wall than son did even. He had on a red coat too, but his waistcoat was sky blue instead of yellow, and he sported a lot more gold buttons and a whole clothesline of gold braids coiled across the front of his coat and up on his shoulders and crisscrossed down the back of it.

"Ho! I say, now," says the Duke, "perfectly rippin!" And he came down and favored me with one of them high sidewise handshakes, with a motion like stirring the mush, you know. "This is a pleashaw, aw, aw, haw, haw!" says the Duke, grinning from ear to ear. He certainly was an affable chap.

"But I thought you was Irish aristocracy," butts in Milt Owen, right over my shoulder. "You sound like an Englishman."

Well, sir, the old boy stiffens like a ramrod. His face gets all set and hard like one of the stone lions



out on the steps, and even his little sidechops seemed to get hoarfrost on em as he looked at Milt. Milt figured he had committed some kind of a fox pass and he was waverin dizzily when the old boy smiled again.

"Bah jove, you compliment me, sir!" he said. "You compliment me! I should hope I would sound like an Englishman. My ancestors were planted in this country by Cromwell."

"And who the — who — who —" stuttered Milt, and I knew that with that insatiable thirst of his for information he was goin to ask who Cromwell was, while I had a kind of sneakin suspicion that any dub that ricocheted around with young Armour and Astor had ought to know who Cromwell was, and so at the proper moment I planted a number eight heel on number five toe of Milt's favorite foot. He interrupted himself with a gulp and looked at me reproachful like.

"Here's Mr. Daniels wishin to be presented to the Duke," says the Earl of Skibbereen, hustlin in between us.

"Mr. Daniels," says the Duke of Lallyskallen, "Mr. Daniels, I am more than happy. Welcome! Welcome to Castle-cruagh!"

"Dee-lighted myself," admitted Wart, shaking hands with easy sang fraw. [All of us gets a little French now, Ben, goin' into a French port every few days.] "Most unexpected pleasure. I had no idea your Lordship was in residence here at this season of the year."

"In residence here." Get that, Ben. Now where the Dickens did old Warthead pick up that line of talk, I says to myself; but I know all right. He got

22      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

it out of some of those three shilling novels which he's always a borin his head into. But it was up to me just then to say something to the young dude, for I see him beginnin to color up like he was goin to get sore at us for putting all our talk up to the old man.

"Earl," I says, "your Pa's got a right nice lookin place here."

"Don't call me Earl, Kennedy, old man," he says.

"It sounds so formal. Call me Skibberreen."

"All right, Skib," I says, "I ain't proud." That's the way I get along with these big folks, Ben, just rub right up against em; and they like it too.

Just then the Duke batted in again.

"Present me to the rest of your friends," he says, easy and affable like.

I turned quick and rounded the bunch up afresh with my eye, because something told me it was time to do it. These gobs of enlisted men ain't got any too much reverence in their make-up at the best, as you know, bein one yourself; but the destroyer bunch is absolutely without respect for God nor man. They work like the devil all the time they're afloat and they do what their officers require of em; they take their life in their hands every time they go to sea and they're ready to sail past the mouth of hell any time to get a healthy slam at Fritz; but they don't care to have no frills asked of em in the way of extra salutes or anything like that. The British Admiral comes aboard the other day for a little run outside, you understand. "Treat 'im like one of the crew," the Captain passes the word. "He don't like a fuss made over 'im."

And I'm blessed if they didn't. On the level,

Ben, nobody on our ship ever looked like they seen him. They acted like admirals was common as warrant officers with them. They done it to please him, but they was pleasin theirselves a darned sight more.

Well, so here was this bunch of half-broke mavericks that had held in as long as they dared, and was just spoilin for something to make em bust out laughin or rough-housin; so I turned around quick and threw em a look that they read and understood the meanin of. "Play up," that look meant, "or I'll have it out of your hide the minute we get back to the ship," that look said, and they savvied it all right. Besides it appeared they were all too buf-faloed by all that red coat and gold clothesline and monocle, to get to breathin natural yet.

"Mr. Allen of Missouri," I says, presentin that pirate, Joe Allen, who, if he got his just deserts, would never be called mister again in all his life.

"Mr. Allen! Aw — what a pleashaw — very great pleashaw — indeed, Mr. Allen," says the Duke, and gives Joe his good right hand in another one of them sidewise paw-the-air motions of his that passes for a handshake. Joe sparred around for some time before he found the hand, and then he must of twisted it or something, for the old boy winced.

"Pleased tuh meet yuh," says Joe. "Pleased tuh meet yuh." Ben, I'm off that expression for the rest of my natural life, for I'm blessed if every one of them twenty-five jackies that I lined up and presented, didn't say it. It sounds awful bourjwah after one has heard it about a dozen times. If they had said, "Howdy, Duke," or "What's the good

24      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

word?" it would a been better. At last it seemed as if old Ma Ford did get it into her nut that there was too much simultaneosity about it all.

"Hello, Duke. How you all's folks been a gettin along?" he drawls in that Texas way of hisn.

"So individual!" smiled the Duke, and Ma bein the last in line, or else bein a little juiced up, I couldn't tell which, hung onto the Duke's hand; or maybe it was just to make conversation. Anyway the old boy asks: "What state do you come from, Mr. Ford? Detroit, I suppose!"

"No; I'm not that Henry," says Ma, which is the first time I ever did know his name was Henry, too. And then he told his lordship where he did come from.

"Ah, Pater," breaks in the young Earl. "A great state, Texas. You have heard of Texas?"

"Texas — oh, er," says the old boy, something kind of wakin up in the way back of his mind — "Texas is where they raise cattle, and, and cow-boys — the men who are so very, very dexterous with the — the riata." And the old boy's face lighted up and he lifted his hand and whirled it round his head. It seemed like he had seen a Buffalo Bill show once in London and he was all enthusiasm.

"Well, I reckon," said Ma, trying to be modest though he don't know the name of the word. "Texas is the greatest cattle state in the whole plumb world."

"You ride, of course?" beamed his Lordship.

Now I got to explain to you, Ben, that Ma is one of these temperamental souls that when he's had about two tablespoonfuls of grape juice and a bottle

of soda-water, gets all lit up like Broadway on New Year's Eve, and he had just about had the necessary ingredients and they was wearin off to the point where Ma was just talkative and dignified. Get him anybody to talk to and Ma's imagination and his eloquence was ripe to flow.

"Ride?" inquires Ma. "Why my dear Mister — Mister — Lallyskidden — My dear Duke — I was born in the saddle."

"Indeed!" and his lordship beams some more. "You throw the rope? You are skillful with the riata?"

Now there is nothin rouses Ma like havin his skill doubted, whether it's poker, or monty or authors, I don't care what. And he rose to the challenge like a trout to a fly.

"My dear Mister Lallyskittle," says Ma, jugglin his lordship's name again and missin it at least as much as before; "far be it from me to boast, but — you see that ring?" Ma's mind was workin like chain lightning now, for he held up one of his ugly hands, on the little finger of which was reposin a gold ring that a girl at the skatin rink had let him wear till next Saturday night. "You see that ring, Duke?"

His lordship lifted his monocle and studied that ordinary lookin' gold band like it was a decoration from the King.

"Well," says Ma, "that ring was give to me as the second prize in a steer-tyin contest at Corsicana at the fall round-up in 1916 when I was home on a furlough."

Now I knew Ma was lyin about the ring, and I had a suspicion that he was lyin in toto, bec'use I

remembered bein stranded in Corsicana over Sunday six years ago, and I tried to hire a horse for a little ride, and there actually wasn't a saddlehorse in the town. I could get plenty of automobiles, but that part of Texas was just so blamed civilized and agriculturalized, you might say, that there wasn't anything doing at all in the horse line. I would bet that they hadn't had a thing like a steer-tyin' contest in Corsicana since Cleveland was president.

However, I thinks, a little lyin' will relieve old Ma and we can steer the Duke onto somebody else presently; but it seemed like the conversation was on tanglefoot flypaper. Every time Ma put a foot down it stuck him up that much more.

"I would be delighted if you would give my people a demonstration of what the feat is like," says his lordship, polite and kind of coaxing; and Ma, remember, Ben, was from Texas, where to oblige is a pleasure. He bowed perfectly grand and blinked his eyes, the old faker, like it would be the easiest thing and the greatest happiness in the world for him to rope and tie a bull elephant for the edification of the Duke and his outfit.

And the old boy really was eager! I didn't know but he was going to pull that gold clothesline off his chest and ask Ma to lasso the chandelier. Instead he led the whole party out onto the lawn and called for a rope; and all the while Ma was reelin off one exploit of his after another, till naturally I begun to be convinced that he must know what he was talkin about. Probly he was a cow punch in his early days, I says to myself; that's how he got to be so fond of milk punch. Probly he has been a

good roper once, and ropin is like swimmin or tight-rope walkin: Once a roper always a roper.

Anyway there they stood in the middle of the lawn, and there was one flunky bringing a rope and there was another herdin a beautiful spotted heifer round from the barns somewhere, and the daynoug was comin soon, whatever it was.

Yet there was Ma talkin away, grand as ever, till the Duke hisself, gettin impatient, presses the rope into Ma's hand. Ma took it, and it looked like then he understood for the first time that they was really expectin a demonstration right then and there. He looked at the rope and he looked at the heifer; but he was willin apparently. He took the rope in his hand and hefted it.

"Purty heavy," he says.

"Fetch a lighter one," says the Duke politely.

"It's got to have a ring in the end of it," Ma says, when they brought it, and he went on talkin, recallin how he bull-dogged a steer in sixteen seconds up to Cheyenne one time and had the whole northwest sore on Texas and him in consequence.

"Tie a ring in it, here," says the Duke, handin the rope to the Earl of Skibberreen.

"Tie a ring in it, there," says Skibberreen, handin it to somebody else.

"Tie a ring in it, there," says that person to another person, and so they kept on passing the rope down till it got to somebody low enough down in the social scale that they had sense enough to tie a ring in anything, and that person was a sort of groom. Anyhow he was dolled up like these grooms that I seen once at the horse show and he come edgin round to me.

28      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

"What kind of a ring," he says,— "a finger ring?"

"No," I explained to him, "a small harness ring, bout a three-quarter inch ring, for the rope to run through." I done this so's Ma couldn't stall any more, for, besides bein tired of havin him monopolize our principal host like he was, I was gettin fed up on these yarns of hisn. Sober, old Ma Ford is one of the squarest shooters I know, but slightly illuminated, she's the biggest four-flusher in the destroyer flotilla; and believe me, Ben, that's sayin something. So, by the time Ma has got through describin a little incident down on the Rio Grande, where him and two other cowboys whipped a whole regiment of Villa's cavalry — an incident which I am morally certain never took place outside of Ma's brain, principally because I know Ma was layin at Mazatlan on the old prune barge at the time — why along comes the groom with the rope.

Ma, still . . . ig, takes it kind of mechanical-like.

"That'll do," he says, testing the knot in the ring, and then passing the other end through it and drawing it up to form a noose, and then a windin and a coilin and all the while talkin, and I'm blessed if it didn't look like the man was used to handlin a rope, me forgettin at the time that Ma is a journeyman sailor by profession.

And they herded the heifer across the lawn again, and everybody kind of fell back, including his lordship, and his earlship and her countessship too, and then all at once Ma seemed to recall something else. "Oh," he says, surprised-like, "I couldn't throw it on foot. I have to ride."

At that I kind of heaved a sigh of relief, for I saw



that Ma couldn't really throw the rope at all, and it looked like he had stalled out of danger and stopped the old boy for fair now. For a moment the Duke's face went so far into mourning that I felt sorry for him, but he come up smilin in a moment, chipper as a daisy and waved his hand toward the groom.

"Saddle Bouncer," he said, "and take him to the paddock. Fetch the heifer there too."

I seen then right off and to the full just how much of a lyin hypocrite Ma was, and it was some much, believe me, for in his eye for just about a second was a look of most awful pain and anxiety. But he covered well, I must say. He smiled and bowed with all that combination of dignity and grace which comes of bein born in Texas and tinctured with John Barleycorn.

"Yes, your honor," he says, with a grand wave of his hand. "Here I am just a stannin round like a stepchild, waitin for you all to give me a chance to throw." He give a sailor hitch to his sailor trousers and started to follow his lordship toward the paddock; but providence intervened to give old Ma respite and an hour or two more of most mortal agony.

"Tea is served, sir," said a flunkey that I hadn't piped off before, but he was dolled up like the others in knee breeches and frills of one kind or another.

"Upon me soul, it is tea-time," said the Duke, glancin at his wrist, and hesitatin as if disappointed. But he was a thoroughbred. He didn't linger a minute between his desire to see Ma rope the heifer and his duty as a host to us gentlemen of the U. S. Navy.

30      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

“Proceed within, gentlemen,” he said — “proceed within.”

They took us to that grand dining room we had seen before, and, Ben, you ought to a glimpsed that table. It was a long table, kind of egg-shaped, and the Duke took his stand at one end of it, and the Earl at the other, and the Countess in the middle; and the Duke he had Ma on one side of him, and Armour on the other; and the Earl, he had Astor Dorgan on one side of him and Daniels Kessler on the other, while the Countess of Kildare was just banked round with sailors, and opposite her, with the rest of the gobs strung out between us, was me planted strategic just where I could watch the whole of em. Besides about half of em was in kicking range under the table, and them that wasn't I give looks and grunts that they bally well understood.

And I must say, Ben, that for gobs that lives on ship-board and takes their daily eats on a destroyer where plates is tin, napkins is unknown and forks is dispensed with, and where the roll and pitch of the boat makes settin the table impossible, and every man takin his food gives an imitation of a monkey in the zoo takin his dinner swinging in the trapeze — for that kind of fellows these mothers little boys of mine did pretty well.

But they certainly consumed disgraceful. You'd think they'd forgot entirely them sandwiches the size of a brick, stuffed with ham and dill pickles, and them slabs of corned beef and pounds of butter and all the pies they had just ate.

“At tea,” I kept tellin em sotto voche, “you aint supposed to eat. You just nibble a wafer and sip your tea.”

"But just look at the grub they're shovelin at us," says Abner Anderson, who's a greedy devil anyway. "They must expect us to eat it."

Only there wasn't any meat! My gosh, how good a platter of cold meat would have looked, cold mutton, you know, Ben, or cold roast beef or cold ham — a sardine even — but there wasn't anything like that. But everything else. Scones, principally. Ever been introduced to a scone, Ben? Well a scone is a little kind of ginger cake with the ginger left out, but all the other good left in and something added. They pass em heaped up in baskets, and with bowls of marmalade or strawberry preserves, and butter — real fresh butter.

The scones is hot. You open em and lay in butter, and then you open em again and lay in jam or preserves on the melted butter, and then you open your lolliper and lay the scone inside and it just kind of dissolves downward like drippin honey, and when you're toward the last of the second dozen of em you begin to worry for fear you aint a going to get to eat two dozen more.

And milk! And cream! They went right out to a kind of spring house by the dairy and brought it in crocksful. Well, I told you the boys ate something scandalous. As for me, I honestly needed to take some sustaining nourishment because I knew what was comin off after a while. I knew as well as anything that they was a debacle a comin beside which the debacle when Eddie Collins stole home on Heinie Zim, last world series, wasn't no debacle at all but just a plain boner.

So I had several scones, and several ladles of preserves and marmalade, and I drank a couple of cups

32      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

of tea, and then when they begun to broach them big crocks of cream — well I didn't want to seem like I didn't appreciate the Duke's hospitality, so I done my iota like the rest of em.

I got to admit though, Ben, that my conscious was beginning to trouble me awful, they was treatin us so doggone white. It's a durn shame, I says to myself, nice people like this, a foolin em thisaway, and I'm a going to get up direckly and tell em its all a gosh durned lie. That none of us is named Astor nor Armour nor Daniels; that none of us is millionaires; that we're nothing at all in fact but just ordinary gobs from the little old U. S. Destroyers, that's not good for nothin much till it comes to stampin on the little tin fish of the Kaiser, and then we're sure there with the hob-nailed boots.

That's what I was inclined to say, Ben, but something told me to wait awhile. Some good angel, it must a been. Same time I was keepin a weather eye on Ma. Ma was a eatin and a talkin and a killin time to beat the band. Every time I looked up there she sat, a lyin like a German Press Bureau; and every minute the time was comin when tea would be over and Ma would have to ride Bouncer.

There was some little speculation among the boys on my side about who Bouncer might be, but I didn't do none of that. Comin up from the beach I had had a glimpse of a sorrel colt with a white star in his forehead and three white feet, prancin round in a little pasture they call a paddock. He looked as full of power as one of our turbines, and he was all pep and ginger. He was the highest spirited animal I ever lamped in my life, and he didn't look to me like any human bein could stay

on him unless he was lashed on him. So the moment his lordship says: "Saddle Bouncer!" I knew who Bouncer was and that Ma's chance of ridin him was just the same as my chance of gettin promoted to Admiral for gallantry in action at this here Duke of Lallyskittle's tea.

But here was the meal movin on, scone by scone, cup of tea by cup of tea, and crock of cream by crock of cream, to its everlastin end; and when it ended old Ma had to up and ride Bouncer and rope the Buttercup Queen or confess that he was a four-flusher and a quitter — two things that you could pull Ma limb from limb and reciprocatin action from reciprocatin action before he would do. I reckon that is the reason why everybody on the ship swears by that old liar the way they do. You just naturally got to stand up for Ma when he's illuminated for the virtues of Ma when his lights is burnin low and regular.

I don't know how his lordship done it, but it seemed like that meal was over all at once with a kind of bang, and the old Duke was standin up straight and dignified as a lamppost at one end, and the young Earl at the other end. At the same time the countess was up and all of us fellers was wrastlin to get up too, and stood there making one circle of blue-jackets round that table, each of em stuffed till he looked like one of these blue sausage balloons that the good old street pedlers sell back on the good old street corners of them good old towns that are back in the land that is fairer than day and by the picture post cards we can see it afar, etc. Get me!

But Ma's hour hadn't come yet. The Duke was too polite to suggest any man's ridin' on a stomach

as full as Ma's, so he leads the way to a kind of arbor and the servants pass cigarettes and cigars, and if any man prefers, why there's a brand new pipe for him if he wants it — and a corncob pipe it was, too, right from old Missouri, for I seen the St. Louis brand on em. And the Countess of Kildare was right among us, puffin a cigarette, and lookin down through the smoke, kind of reflectin-like, with her eyes squinted up just like a man's; and I'm blessed if she didn't look fetchiner than ever then. I never could stand to see a girl smoke, but aint it astonishin how vice becomes some women?

But all things have an end, even the politeness of this Irish aristocracy, and the time was now approachin when Ma had either to ride the bronch and lass the heifer or confess that he was a natural born liar, and I tell you Ma would a died before he would admit that.

"Oh, aw, by the way," remarks the Duke, casual-like as if he'd just remembered, "would you mind obligin' us now," he says, "with that demonstration of your skill with the — the rope?"

"Oh, would you not, Mr. Ford?" says this girl with the blue eyes and the black ringlets. "Do, I pray you," she says, and she turned them blue orbs on him full candle power.

Well, say! Ma would a charged the whole German army on a burro for that look.

"I jest nachelly will, Miss, Miss Lallyskallen," he says, "at yore request!" And he turned to his lordship, brave as any knight at one of them old time tournaments.

"Lead me to em," he says, struttin something

awful, with his chest and his elbows sticken out at once, and Ma bein bowlegged, his knees was also sticken out, as they led him to the paddock, the whole party followin. The heifer was there waitin and lifted up her mild eyes from the grass and took a look with a sort of a "woof" at the idea of all these folks in all their fine clothes paradin out into her pasture.

But I'm doggoned if Ma, looking down at his self, didn't find one last excuse for stallin.

"I generly have spurs when I'm goin to ride," he says, reflective-like.

"Bouncer," says my lord, kind of gentle and apologetic, "I think Bouncer is not used to bein ridden with spurs."

Ma got one of them stubborn looks on his face, but inwardly he was probly prayin there wasn't a spur on the place.

"I ain't used none to ridin without em," he says, just like that, short and decisive.

"Fetch spurs," says my lord, without another word, and hope fell in one bosom plumb down to the bottom of the thermometer.

Well, about the time they got old Ma blindfolded and one leg tied up, and backed him into them spurs, why here come Bouncer; and I got to tell you again, Ben, that Bouncer was some horse! He stood sixteen hands high if he stood an inch. Speed stuck out all over him and his feet touched the ground like they just hated it, little springy steps, you know, and you just naturally and involuntarily perceived that if he lifted up one of them after feet of hisn and took a shot at you, that he would kick you plumb into the middle of the bay. Horse? I never seen

36      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

so much horse inside of one skin as that colt showed from the tip of his ears, right back to his tail; and there he stopped, for would you believe it, Ben, that beautiful piece of animal action didn't have no tail at all — just a little kind of stump about five inches long, with some wisps of hair hanging to it like a mourning plume.

Well, it sure outraged me to see a beautiful horse mutilated like that. Ma seen it quick, and his whole expression changed. He got sullen right away.

"Aint fitten for a cowhorse none — without his ta-a-ail," Ma drawls, kind of mutterin' like. "He caint balance his self. Never did ride no horse without no tail on him," he grumbled on, gettin' ungrammaticaler every minute.

But I could see that besides bein indignant for the horse, he was just plumb scared to death at the look of that 300 H.P. animal, for he knew he wouldn't never get on top of him even. Ridin him would be just the same as ridin one of our torpedoes when it gets nicely started on its way to Fritz.

"I dessay," says his lordship, "you will find that Bouncer can jolly well balance himself. He's been takin fences without his tail for a season or two and I've never known him to go down yet."

Takin' fences! Ben, that one idea burst in Ma's mind like a star-shell. This was a hunter then, and the minute Ma got on him, he was goin to make for the nearest fence. And yonder it was — not a fence, you know, but a stone wall, like all the fences in Ireland, and it looked eight feet high. "When Bouncer goes over that wall where am I goin?" That was the question in old Ma's eyes, just as clear as anythin.



But there was a kind of a manner about his lordship that didn't exactly admit of monkeyin any more. It struck me once that his lordship was kind of in a hurry about somethin, and then again I thought he just might figure he was bein kidded; and the way his jaw come down, and his lower lip stuck out, I knew here was a guy that if he found out what we'd done to him, would go leakin right out to the Admiral; and in five minutes the Admiral would be flyin' the white ensign upside down and have every Destroyer Captain in the flotilla aboard the flagship to know whose men had been raisin Cane now, and when they got through I wouldn't have a blamed stripe on me but prison stripes — which I wouldn't mind so much, anything being a relief from life on one of these destroyers, only I'd hate not to be around when we lick the Germans. *When we lick the Germans*, Ben, get that? For we are agoin to lick those birds as sure as Germans bombs hospitals and sticks bayonets in little children.

Well, with all this pleasant vision floating through my mind, here is Ma doin the froze-with-horror act once more, for somethin else had struck him. His little round black eye had screwed up, till it wasn't no bigger than a gimlet, and the point of its glance was glued fast to the saddle. It was an English saddle, and an English saddle, to look at it, Ben, aint no more than a porous plaster stuck up on the horse's withers. Now a Texas saddle, if you've ever been in one, is kind of like a sleepin'-bag compared to this English saddle. It has a big high horn in front of you to hang on to, and it has a big high cantle at the back to hold you in when you're going up hill; and no horse that aint a trained acrobat can

spill a man out of a Texas saddle that's got any hang-on to him at all, unless the said horse lays down and rolls over, which is a kind of German trick. But this English saddle was smooth in front and smooth behind. You could ride anywhere on the horse, Ben, from his ears to his tail, without any interruptions from the saddle. It would be absolutely neutral all the time.

Ma had another gasp comin when he looked at the stirrups. A Texas stirrup, Ben, is as big as an Irish house. You drop your great big clumsy foot into it and it's like lettin your leg down into a post-hole, and when you get both feet in the stirrups nothin can't hardly get you out, unless, as I said, you're turned upside down and shook out. But this English saddle just had two little loops of iron about an inch wide to put your feet in, and Ma looked at the spring in Bouncer's knees and the width of them stirrups, and he knew his feet wouldn't never be in em but once, and that would be the time he put em in there first.

You can bet there was an icy rivulet where Ma's spinal cord ought to a been, but I got to hand it to him, Ben. He never winced so anybody but me could notice it. And most all the while he kept on talking casual-like, one thing and another, to his lordship, and tyin the end of his throwin rope in the ring on the saddle, and then coilin it — but for all that I knew ol' Ma was just scared plumb into hysterics, and I edged round onto the other side of the horse, under pretext of helpin to make the throwin rope fast to the ring in the saddle, and old Ma kind of bent over so he could hear me acrost the horse's withers.

"Give it up," I whispers. "I'm ready to make a clean breast of the thing."

Ma didn't say nothin at first. He just looked. And when he did speak what he said was what you kill a man for down in Texas, unless he smiles at the same time, and Ma didn't smile. I wouldn't dast even to write it because it wouldn't pass the censor. I wouldn't dast even write it in my diary. Besides I want to forget it.

"What's your scheme?" I says.

"I'm goin to pop the spurs to this bronch and get to Helena Montana out of here," he ventriloquizes.

"Kind of manage to get that there gate open beind you," he says, "and I'm agoin to make it look like old Bouncer bolted."

"You're a goin to run away," I says, "and leave us all in this hole you've got us into."

Again he didn't say nothin for a minute; he just looked at me kind of straight and confessin like, and this time there was awful appeal in his glance.

"In just about seven minutes from now," he says, "I'm going to be waiting at the landin stage for a boat to take me off to the ship."

It was six miles to the landing, and Ma was allowin' himself the extra minute for viewin the scenery, I suppose.

"Where'll Bouncer be?" I says kind of reproachful. "Think of this fine horse."

"Damfino," he says, desperate, "and what's more, damficare. I wish Bouncer would a broke his leg while we was havin tea."

"Already!" says his lordship, actin like the starter at the race track, for his lordship was lookin

40      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

at his wristwatch and sure gettin anxious about something.

"All set!" says Ma, with a kind of reminiscence of a Texas warwhoop, and the next thing I knew, here come the wide-legged trouser of a sailor, flyin over the off side of Bouncer with a spur on the heel of it, and one second later there come on my horizon, which was Bouncer's back, a sailor's blue blouse and a sailor's blue flat-topped hat with the name of the ship in gold letters on the front of it, and under it was the face of Ma, set like you see em set in pictures when soldiers are goin over the top. Well, old Ma was going over the top all right, but he was goin game.

"Stand clear!" he says, as I guided his foot into the stirrup, thereby doin the last thing I ever expected to do for poor old Ma.

I wish, Ben, you could of seen the figure of him. He didn't look no more like an equestrian on that horse than anything. He was hunched up like he was ridin the forward yard of the ship in a storm; and pawin at the reins. These English bridles have two sets of gear on em, you know, and Ma, with his throwin rope coiled in one hand, was all tangled up in these extra reins, while I, backin off quick, just seemed kind of accidental like to open the gate behind me, and not noticed either because everybody was lookin at Ma and Bouncer and the rope and the heifer.

"Typical American position in the saddle," explains his lordship, beaming round on all his retinue. "Quite typical — yes — Tod Sloan, you remember, high up on the neck!"

Bouncer was naturally impatient to get goin. He

took one of those quick snappy steps of hisn, and it unsteadied Ma on this smooth round English saddle ridin which was like ridin one of these smooth round rockin buoys out in the channel, so that when Bouncer moved his starboard leg, why Ma rolls slightly to port, and grippin tighter with his own starboard leg, he pops the spur into Bouncer. Bouncer looked surprised, and then he looked like he thought it might a been a mistake, but just for luck, he bounced about seventeen feet sideways, goin clear over Midget Case, who's a nice little cuss but always manages to get right in front of any play that's comin off.

"My eye!" says his lordship.

"My Gawd!" I groans, kind of silent and prayerful like.

Ma strung off to one side like a piece of bunting, and then doubled up like a jackknife, but I'm blessed if when he come down, he didn't come down on top of Bouncer.

I reckon that was because the motion was kind of like one the ship makes when she's buckin' a souwester about two points on the port bow. You know how it is on a destroyer, Ben. We run with the bulkheads closed and there aint no way from the foc'sle to the engine room except over the open deck, and you start out at four A.M. to relieve the watch there that have been on duty now eight hours, because nobody couldn't get down to relieve em before, the storm is that bad; and feelin sorry for the poor devils that's got to stick it out down there till their reliefs do come if its twenty-four hours, and you're the only man in your watch that's got the guts to go, why you take a can of tinned Willie

## 42      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

under one arm and a loaf of bread under the other and start, and its darkern the inside of a smokestack, and the wind is howlin and the waves is ragin, and you don't know but what you've shipped on a submarine. But you keep feelin your way till first thing you know the deck aint where you thought it was, and the ship aint there either, and you do a pitch and dive act and end up hanging onto a guide-wire and swinging straight out over a mile deep sea, with the tinned Willie flying one way and your loaf of bread castin itself on the waters in another direction.

Well, this move of Bouncer's was kind of like that, and so I reckon that was how come that Ma got onto it so quick. But it seemed that when she recovered herself, sailor fashion, she sideswiped Bouncer for about a yard with that port spur of hers, in consequence of which Bouncer hadn't no more than lit till he lit out again, and th' time right straight ahead. It looked to me like he was aimin to knock his brains out on that stone wall. But no sir! he kind of squatted and shivered and went over it, just like the ship would have took one of them swells that used to come out of the Irish Sea off Holyhead last winter.

"Toppin!" shouts his lordship. "Toppin! Most daring feat of horsemanship I ever saw. Perfectly toppin!"

"Toppin hell," I says to myself. "We'll find Ma dead, gosh durn her, on the other side of the wall."

I give a leap, caught the top of it with my hands, pulled up and peered over for one satisfying look at his mangled remains, and there wasn't no mangled

remains there; but off ahead of me was a kind of gentle springy thud on the turf, like the bouncin of a rubber ball on a nice thick carpet, and yonder was Bouncer, that little short tail of his sticking up like the poop of an old lime-juicer, and on top of him was a monkey in the uniform of a U. S. jack tar.

Yep; old Ma was still there, a rollin round on that saddle like the little white marble in the big bowl over at Bordeaux. And just then Bouncer come to a nice wide ditch. He did it in three counts. One — he kind of squatted.

“Don’t he take off beautiful,” says my lord, who somehow had got up with his eyes above the top of the wall.

Two — he sailed over that ditch like one of these flyin fish down at Guantanamo.

And, Three — he put all four feet down together on a piece of turf at the other edge that wasn’t no bigger than the Countess of Kildare’s handkerchief. You never seen nothin like it, it was that artistic. Hornsby, clickin his heels at the plate, just before he squares off to lam out a three-bagger aint no neater.

And the next minute Bouncer was pointin his prow for another wall. You’ve heard of the great Chinese Wall, Ben? Well I never saw it but it wasn’t no greater than this wall that Bouncer was makin’ for now.

He rose at it and Ma seemed to kind of move back to the after-bridge, as it were. Bouncer undoubled them jackknife legs of his and Ma sort of scurried along the deck forra’d, and the last thing I seen of that jump was just two pair of heels. One was Bouncer’s, his shoes shining like Ty Cobb’s

## 44      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

spikes when he goes into second. The other pair belonged to Ma and indicated that he was takin a nose dive from the crow's nest to the foc'sle deck.

"Individual style!" says his lordship to me, his face level with mine at the top of the wall now, because a couple of flunkeys was holdin' him up, while I was stickin up there with my toes.

"Yes," I says, "Ford always was kind of individual." And I scrambled over the wall feelin awful sober because I knew that this time when I got to the top of the rise over behind that other wall, I really was a goin to find them mangled remnants of Ma for sure.

Well, his lordship scrambled over that first wall right after me, and it appeared to me like he was also possessed with a kind of curiosity as to what was up there at the top of the hill, but he was too polite to say so, just goin along with me for company.

And the rest of the retinue was spillin themselves over the wall, and coming along as fast as they could — first a thin blue line of sailors, scared plumb to death, and then a bunch of these servants, mostly old and hamhocked or disabled, you know, people too old to go to war or people that's been and come back with game legs or caved-in slats or shell-shock, which, if you ain't seen any of it, believe me, Ben, is somethin horrible.

They was streakin up the hillside after us for their first look at the remains of Ma, but when we come to look round for her she wasn't there; and for a minute there wasn't nobody in sight at all, and then we got a snap-shot of Bouncer toppin another wall two fields beyond us, for it seemed like he under-



stood that Ma wanted to do a little jumpin and jumpin was Bouncer's business.

There was plenty of walls. Ireland, as far as I've observed it from the deck of a destroyer and a few innocent expeditions ashore, is cut up into little pieces for crazy-quiltin. Some of the fields are as big as Gramercy Park, and some is big enough to lay out a baseball diamond in, but everybody would be makin home runs and the scorers couldn't tell the outfielders from the in.

Well that makes plenty of fences, and the fences are walls and Bouncer was bouncin em and bless me if old Ma wasn't bouncin along too. Only it struck me as I glimpsed him now across two fields, that he wasn't hardly in the saddle at all.

Bouncer turned about that time and come bouncin back, and when he loped across the top of our field, there was Ma hangin with her head down and hands to the ground, and then in a minute she was hangin the same way on the other side of the horse.

"Doin stunts, bah jove!" declared his lordship. "Doin cowboy stunts with Bouncer while he's warmin him up for the ropin. Mos astonishin!"

"Mos!" says I, suspicionin there was something wrong but unable to figure it out at all, for Bouncer went on jumpin walls down the hillside for half a mile and then out of sight around the point, and then directly here he come jumpin back again. And every time he topped a wall, I caught sight of something blue, and I knew that was Ma and she was still stickin. Grit? Old Ma was as gritty as this here war-bread they gives you over here at the restaurants; and my hat was sure off to her.

Bouncer had been travelin in a circle round us

46      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

and was down on the other side of the castle by this time. Me and his lordship started back that way, and his young lordship the Earl of Skibberreen, being behind us, was now ahead of us, while all the rest of the bunch that had kind of strung out over the fields and walls and ditches, was struggling in toward the house, when I heard a motor honk, kind of a funny sort of a honk, up the road a piece. And say! When that honk honked, his lordship turned and looked up the road startled-like, gasped and struck out runnin for the house like he was goin round the bases in eleven seconds.

Honest to goodness, Bée. I never seen gold lace, and a wig, and a red coat, and silk calves, fly like that combination flew. It looked like a daytime comet goin down the field. He bounced over that ditch like Bouncer. It had took two men to lift him over the paddock wall before, but now he just made one flyin leap and landed on top of it and was over and gone.

He hadn't said Goodbye, or Excuse me, or I'm sorray, or nothing like that, the way they do over here all the time to be polite; and I couldn't get him at all — not even when I saw his young lordship runnin too and shoutin something to the stragglin crowd and roundin em all up and shufflin em out of sight, some to the barn and some to the house. Then, just as I got out of the paddock past the barns, I saw a big gray motor car that looked like she had engines in her as big as our ship's, come coughin round the corner and stop with a bang just as his lordship arrived at the — the curb, you might call it, where the car had stopped.

“Important guests,” I says to myself, seein him

stand rubbin his hands and hiccupin and beamin and smilin all at once, and frownin back the young Earl of Skibberreen, so's he could open the auto door himself.

"Must be the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland," I says, tryin to orientate myself and thinkin this would be the time to round up my crowd and skiddoo with the remains of Ma — if it wasn't, Ben, that I haven't got that big a streak of yellow in me, and have just naturally got to stop and see any mess like this right straight through and out the front gate.

Well, while I was lookin, a seedy old party with a gray suit, a short, stocky chap, with skimpy white whiskers and a golf cap cocked over one ear, got out of the car, turned his back on the Earl of Skibberreen, punched Lord Lallyskallen in the center of his red waistcoat with an elbow, made him get back out of the way and himself helped a young lady out, that was wearin a kind of an army uniform, one of what they call "Wacks," W. A. A. C., you know. Her cheeks was red, and with her khaki and brass buttons she was just about the chickest lookin thing — get me, Ben, chickest? — that's one I picked up over to Havre — the chickest lookin' chicken you ever saw.

By the way this old party looked round, by George, he might have owned the place, and he went trudgin up the front steps of the castle, like, by thunder, he didn't give a darn for anything. And right after him comes Lord Lallyskallen, carryin his canes and umbrellas and the lady's little kind of satchel; and after him comes the Earl of Skibberreen, carryin two suit cases; and both of em mincin along like they would be much obliged if the old

48      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

man and the girl would kindly walk on their necks. As they came up the steps out rushes that other little dream in calico, the girl with the black corkscrew waves in her hair and the wonderful blue black eyes, that I told you about.

For a time I stood watchin the play, and then, hailin the chauffeur who sat bolt and upright as a telegraph pole, waitin for everything to be took out of the car:

“Who’s the old party?” I says.

“Lord Lallyskallen,” he says.

“No, no,” I says — “the old duffer that come in your car.”

“Sir!” he says, lookin at me like I was some kind of molecule, “that was James Herbert, Lord Lallyskallen and Earl of Skibberreen. The lady with him is his niece, and only heir, the Countess of Kildare.”

Well, say, Ben! For just one second or may be two I felt like I had been gassed, and then I began to get my natural breath again.

“And who,” I says, “is the fat old party with all the brass wire on his coat?”

“That is Hoskins, the butler.”

The butler, Ben. Then I knowed I had been gassed. There was pains all through my chest — laughin pains, and hatin pains. But I controlled myself. I jolly well had to, for in just about ten seconds I expected to see Lord Lallyskallen’s favorite hunter come gallopin by with his sides drippin bloody froth, with that fool Ma stickin to him still just like a lookout in the crow’s nest. In such circumstances I just naturally knew from the look of this old duffer that he would take fire by sponta-

neous combustion and begin to scorch and blister everything about him. So, as already remarked, I controlled myself.

"And who's the young guy with plenty of local color on him but not so much brass?"

"That's the footman," says the chauffeur.

"The footman. Uh-huh," I says to myself, for I had suspicioned that already.

"I just got one more question," I says, when I saw that black-curled, blue-eyed dream come rushin out and begin to take the young woman's coat off her shoulders. "Who's the girl with the white apron?"

"She's the parlor maid," he says.

To think, Ben, that a woman could be so false! But she's probably innocent of any wrong intent, I says to myself, the way a man will make excuses for a pretty woman. But the fellers! The doggoned skinflints — a butler and a footman a hoaxin us that way!

And to think I was so soft I come near admittin to that vulgar old geeser that we had lied to him a little! I wisht I had Ma's spur so I could kick myself with it.

But just then the old duffer, the real Lord of Lallyskallen and Earl of Skibberreen, all in one, turned around on the top step of his house and give the place the final once over before goin inside. Me being there, clutterin up the landscape, naturally he espied me. I didn't try to duck nor nothin' because I felt it in my boots that something was coming to me. There couldn't be no diversion created that would relieve me of facing the thing out — not even the sight of four men comin round the corner car-

ryin the scrambled and salvaged body of poor old Ma, stretched out on the milk-house door. So there I stood lookin at him when his eyes shoaled up on me.

"Who's that man standing there?" he says to his butler, but knowing all the time jolly well who I was.

"He's an American sailor, sir," says his butler, and I could just imagine how that guy's knees were trembling. For a moment the old boy stared at me, straight as a whistle, and powerful fierce lookin.

"Come here, my man," he says, and he didn't look so fierce any more and his voice was kind of bland.

None of this "my man" stuff for me, Ben. I don't like it; but the old guy probably meant well.

"There's a party of em round here," explains the butler, soft and soapy, "and I may say, your lordship, that knowing your lordship's fondness for Americans, I took the liberty of havin em entertained at tea; and since that some of the servants have been showin em round the place."

"Quite right of you, Hoskins, quite right," says his lordship. "Why, there's a jolly lot of em yonder." His lordship's eye shot away over my head toward the barn, and sure enough here come the rest of the gang; but I couldn't see they was carryin anybody. They was sober as judges, though; but I knew the reason for that all right. It was the sight of poor old Ma with his back broke or something, but just then I made out Ma struttin long in the middle of em, walkin a little inconvenient-like, it seemed; but walkin nevertheless and holdin his head up prouder'n any peacock you ever saw.

"They're quite nice young gentlemen, I must say," goes on the butler, the hypocrite, "and very entertaining. In fact there's several very well to do young men in this party — the son of the Secretary of the Navy, and young Mr. Armour and Mr. Astor. This young man here is almost a millionaire himself."

Perhaps the old lord saw me blush, or discerned me hitchin round, or may be he read my mind, or just naturally had a little sense.

"Fiddlesticks, Hoskins, you old fool!" he sniffed, "they were spoofing you. But you did right to entertain them."

I was already feelin relieved about Ma, and now I gathered in one gulp that we was goin to come clear on the other counts too.

"Bring your men up here," says the Duke, for they had piled up back there in a bunch, sensing that something somehow was wrong.

"Fall in!" I says, snappy and sharp. "'Tension! Forward, column right, march — half left, forward, halt, right face!"

I had em standin in a line in front of the Duke, and I had their mouths clamped tight shut, so they couldn't ask any fool question that would give the thing away.

"Very soldierly!" says the Duke, eyin the line; and I got to admit that bunch of gobs standin there stiff as ramrods for a minute did themselves proud.

"Parade rest!"

I give them parade instead of at ease so's to slack up the strain a bit but without loosenin their tongues any; but it was an unnecessary precaution because the Duke began just then to make a speech to us all.

"Men," he says, "men of our sister-daughter nation: I am proud to know that you have been entertained upon my estate, and I trust the entertainment, poor as it must perforce be in these war-times, was given with such a gracious spirit as made its poverty seem abundance."

I had to admit that it had been done with a fine spirit, all right, and I begun to forgive that old velvet-coat, who would right now have been laughin in his sleeve at us if he wasn't so awful scared that somebody would let out to his lordship how he had took him off and bunked us.

"I have heard of the work of the American destroyers," his lordship was goin on, "of their superior construction, of the wonderful seamanship with which they are handled, and the efficiency and skill which is displayed from the Captain on the Bridge to the last man in the boiler-room. Our Admiral has told me about it. All England rings with your praise. I understand that even your enlisted men are conspicuous for — for *imagination* —"

I give Ma one straight look, where she stood in the middle of the line.

"— for *audacity* —"

I shot Ma another eyefull.

"— and for sheer *hangin* on."

Ma give me back a look of gloatin triumph. The darned fool seemed to figure the old boy was talkin about him.

"Soldierly qualities — every one of em," goes on the orator of the day. "Good afternoon, fellow-battlers, good afternoon. You are fighting the battle of civilization, and I invite you to come again to



Castlecrugh when I hope to have the pleasure of receivin you in person."

"Three cheers for the Duke of Lallyskallen!" says I.

"And for the Earl of Skibberreen!" butts in Wart.

"And for Lloyd George!" says Ma, his darkened mind havin figured out the old lord that way.

They give the cheers, and they stuck on a tiger for good measure, and then I marched 'em down to the boat as fast as ever I could get 'em there.

I was feelin powerful lucky about our getaway, and at the same time I was feelin powerful humble at the mighty nerve of Ma, and wonderin and wonderin how in time he ever done it. It looked like "*imagination* — *audacity* — and *hangin on*" all right, the way the old boy got it in his speech, but —

"How in Sam Hill did you do it?" I whispered to Ma, soon as I got the chance.

"Shucks, Bilge!" he says, and his old face looked as honest as honesty ever looked in its whole bloomin life. "Shucks! I found that after spending just one winter buckin along the deck of an American Destroyer in these here British seas, sticken on to that jumper wasn't no trick at all. I could a rolled a cigarette on that there Bouncer's back any time, if I'd a had the makins."

Well, I knew there was something in what he said about ridin the buckin deck of our destroyers in the storms of winter, but I knew too there was a lie in it somewhere. It came out later when I see Ma perchin way up forward in the motor-sailer,

54      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

foldin his arms about his front kind of tender and awful partickler about nobody touchin him.

"How'd she ever make it, stickin on to that bronch?" I says to Pete Corhan.

"She never rode that bronch at all," says Pete, short and ugly, because Pete's a natural grouch. "She was tied on."

"Tied on? How's that?"

"That ropin rope," explains Pete. "You tied it to the ring of the saddle, and when that horse made the first jump sidewise, Ma let go of the rope to hold on, and it swung round him. Then he grabbed it again for something more to hold on to, and there he was roped in. He kept windin hisself up in it all the time; and when we come on him down there in the field, Bouncer had his legs tangled in the end of it and was stopped; and there was old Ma cutely unwindin hisself and peepin over the top of the wall at us at the same time. 'Where's that gosh-darned heifer, now?' he says, when we come up to him."

And so, Ben, our picnic turned out a plumb success. But it come near to not, and just goes to show that life on a destroyer is tough any way you take it. You bums on the battleships has it easy.

So long,

**BILGE.**

## II

### BILGE AND THE "Q" BOAT

"BILGE, do you-all consider yohse'f a brave man?" inquired the chief boson's mate in his Texan drawl.

"Some," admitted the chief machinist's mate with a look of what he hoped was becoming modesty.

"Well, then, what's a 'Q' boat?" The connection was not clear, but it might appear later.

"Search me, Ma! What is she?" And Kennedy looked up interestedly from the bottom of the dory, where he was doubled incomprehensibly about the engine.

The chief machinist's mate was conceded to be the only man who could make the said engine of the said dory run, and he took a pride in that fact. To-day, when she was wanted worst, the dory was perversely more out of kilter than usual and lay sprawled on the mid-deck, opposite the engine-room hatch, with Kennedy inside and tinkering inquisitively, unscrewing nuts, looking at carburetors, examining spark plugs, and testing aim-pump valves or any other gadget that might possibly have been the seat of such cantankerous misbehavior. There was a smear of oil and grease overlying the freckles on Bilge's face, and his rack of straight red hair, which had hung annoyingly over his eyes in a lurid waterfall as he peered into the intricacies of the motor, was tossed back over his brow when he lifted his head and turned to contemplate the homely but benign features of the chief boson's mate.

"They're makin' one over at the basin," Ma observed as, after tearing off a bite of plug twist, he sat on the gunwale of the motor dory and gazed blandly down at the knotted figure in the greasy dungarees.

"Out of what?" inquired Bilge, piqued as always by problems in construction.

"Some kind of an old lime-juicer," deposed the Texan. "I allow 'at she was about the toughest-lookin' old hulk you ever laid your eyes on to start with, but they-all have got her camouflloed up to look like a right smart of a boat now."

"What they goin' to do with her?"

"Hunt submarines."

"Hunt submarines? Ma, you make a noise like a nut," reproved Bilge.

"I dunno about that," demurred Ma, who was undertaking this exposition with the express idea of involving his bosom friend in a mad project to which he was himself already committed, and who must proceed therefore with circumspection. "The idea is to take this old tub out for a sort of decoy duck, and run her back and forth across the Channel till a sub comes up and torpedoes her, and then they're goin' to turn round and everlastingly lam the tar out of the Hun."

The monkey wrench fell with a clatter to the bottom of the boat. Bilge untied one-half of the square knot formed by his legs and arms and sat up quite straight.

"That sounds reasonable now, don't it?" he commented with sarcasm that was meant to blight. "Let yourself get sunk and then turn round and sink the boat that sunk you!"

"Hand me the screw driver, Ma, and I'll tighten up some of those screws that's loose in your head."

"She kin do it," argued Ma, undeterred. "She's a reg'lar floating arsenal."

"Hey?" And for a moment the keen questioning eyes of Bilge took on a light of cunning appreciation.

"Yeh!" opined Ma, and manifested the degree of his satisfaction at having got this much of a rise out of Bilge by expectorating over the side in a graceful arc. This arc, however, took no account of Dyckman, on a scaffold a few feet above the water, artistically retouching the zebra stripes on the side of the United States Destroyer *Judson*, at present on duty in European waters.

"Here!" snarled an angry voice from out of sight. "Who's mussin' up my yellow paint with tobacco juice?"

But Ma, innocently unaware of his relation to that angry tone, was going on to describe the "Q" boat:

"Forward on the bridge is a sort of monkey house. When you touch a button the sides of the monkey house fall down, and, by jingo, they's a gun a-settin' there! Then stuck in some false work about the waist hatch is two more guns, one on each side. And aft there's a thing that looks like a water tank on the deck, but it's canvas. You pull a rope and it drops, and, by heck, there's another gun!"

Having thus concluded his description, Ma expectorated again, and, as before, the line of his indirect fire was perfect. This time no angry word came up from over the side, but a pair of wrathful

eyes appeared at the level of the deck and took a careful observation, while a right hand poised a brushful of sticky, gooey yellow paint.

"But what the Sam Hill good are her guns after they've let a torpedo into her? She'll sink in five minutes," declared Bilge with a total loss of enthusiasm for the project.

"That's the next point," explained Ma with the self-contained air of one who held all wisdom in his grasp. "You couldn't sink her if you planted a torpedo in her every fifty feet from end to end. And when the sub comes up to loot her and take off prisoners they just lam her."

Ma smiled ingratiatingly, but an expression of strong and utter disapprobation spread itself over the usually amiable features of the chief machinist's mate.

"Fine idea, isn't it?" he snorted. "Shoot us gobs in the engine room all to Davy Jones, while the deck force and the gun crews lays up nice and safe. Why, certainly!" And Bilge's scorn was meant to be entirely withering. "That scheme is so good you must 'a' thought it all out by yourself, Ma!"

"I ast you if you was brave," reminded Ma delicately.

Bilge ignored this subtle shaft.

"Besides," he argued heatedly, "what's to prevent old Fritz's just slipping in his pill and getting away? You're lying up there with your guns all nicely camouflaged and nobody in sight to shoot at. What does that get you?"

"Fritz has got a habit of searching an abandoned ship," explained Ma.

"But if you've abandoned ship there's nobody there to work the guns."

"That's the foxy part of it, Bilge," elucidated Ma, drawing on fresh reserves of patience. "They just pretend to abandon ship. Two or three boatloads that looks like the full crew goes down the davits and rows off, but the fightin' men stays aboard."

"But wait," taunted Bilge; "wait! Fritz's also got a habit of havin' a little target practice by firing on crews that abandons ship. The fellows that go out in those boats to convince the Hun that this ship is bona fide abandoned are going to get shot as full of holes as your shirt."

"Not on your life," Ma argued stoutly. "Before a submarine begins to shell she's got to come up, hasn't she, and got to get her men up on top to work the gun, and by the time she does all that what's our guns done to her? They've sunk her — that's what they've done!"

"Our guns? You talk like you was going on her."

"I allow to," admitted Ma with a foxy grimace. Bilge was nonplused.

"But she's a limey, you say?"

Quite consistently our enlisted sailormen call any British ship a limey, from the old lime-juicers; and all English jack-tars are limeys and seldom anything else to the American gob.

"She was a limey, but they've turned her over to us to take out."

The indignation of Bilge burned hot again. "Just what I figured," he declared, hitching his dungarees round him desperately. "They go and get up the

ship and they get up the scheme, but they have to turn it over to us to get the men who has got the immortal courage to do the job. And who's a-going to take her out, I'd like to know?"

"Captain Bradshaw!"

Ma announced this with the air of one who has released a thunderclap of a sensation.

Bilge's lurid greasy features expressed both amazement and concern. Involuntarily he glanced toward the bridge of the *Judson*, which was where Captain Bradshaw mostly had his habitat.

"It's a plant!" denounced Bilge. "They assigned him on purpose, because they know there's a lot of men on this boat that'll do for Bradshaw what they wouldn't do for no one else — men that'll go along just to be on hand and to look out for him."

"They didn't assign him; he volunteered," enlightened Ma.

"Say!" accused Bilge. "You seem to know a bloomin' lot about this enterprise, don't you?"

"I'm goin' to be his chief boson's mate," deposed the Texan, releasing his Sensation Number Two with effective self-restraint.

"Oh! And I suppose, you old alleged ex-cow-punch, you figure that by telling me all this long and thrilling story I'll be darned fool enough to volunteer, too, and take my own particular watch with me — take the best bunch of engine men in the flotilla down into that old hooker with the compartments locked, and cruise back and forth waiting for some torpedo to blow us all to kingdom come, so Captain Bradshaw can get the D. S. O. and the Legion of Honor, and so on. Well, you're wrong. You know, oncet in a while, Ma, out in my native Mon-



tana, we used to tie a bleating calf to a trap when we were trying to catch a mountain lion. Well, I always did have a lot of sympathy for the calf, and I'm not going to be the calf this time."

"That's the way you got it figured, hey?" answered Ma with an expression of disappointment, and lifting his chin slightly he relieved himself of accumulations of plug twist by an expectoration so hearty that it was meant to convey to Bilge that he spat out of his mouth all such lukewarm prudential philosophies as the machinist's mate had just expressed.

An instant later the paintbrush left the indignant hand of Dyckman, describing a very flat trajectory, but traveling with such high initial velocity that it carried well over the bowed head of Ma Ford, to find its billet with a swishy smeary thud exactly on the ear of Chief Gunner Abner Anderson, who was walking innocently but importantly along the deck with no thought of wandering into Dyckman's barrage of revenge and reprisal.

The brush next caromed over the head of Abner and fell innocently at the feet of A. B. Seaman Jurgenson, who that day was on gangway duty. Jurgenson looked up indignantly to see what careless person had dropped a paintbrush, and by way of protest and punishment lightly kicked the offending object into the bay.

Abner meanwhile had turned quickly to look for the missile which had so rudely smitten him, and found it not. Searching next for the person who had hurled it he was equally unsuccessful, because Dyckman, having observed the mischance of his aim, had stepped off the knot which had supported

## 62      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

him, slipped down the rope to his scaffold, dropped a perfectly good bucket of yellow paint into the waters beneath him, seized a brush with black pigment upon it, and begun industriously to wield it upon another zebra stripe.

"Who hit me?" demanded Abner, and immediately his hand went to his ear, about which was an oozy feeling as of blood. "Who hit me?" he growled again, gazing at the smear of yellow paint in his hand.

Ma, the innocent cause of this sad mischance which had befallen Abner, looked up surprised, but maintaining an air of dignified composure, though with amusement in his heart, as he contemplated the discomfiture of the chief gunner; for nobody on the *Judson* loved Abner in particular, excepting only Abner, whose fondness for himself was considered noticeable, making up what others lacked in that respect.

"You look good, Abner, with one yellow ear," decided Ma after a critical glance. "It's a wonder to me your folks didn't think of that a spell ago, and camouflage you up thataway. You might 'a' been something now besides the chief gunner on a destroyer, where everybody knows there ain't no use for a chief gunner anyway."

"Who in Sam Hill threw this paint on me?" roared Abner, advancing menacingly as he noted sounds of uncontrollable laughter issuing from the bottom of the dory.

"I didn't," said Bilge resentfully, rising up suddenly, monkey wrench in hand. "I don't see that anybody did. It's probably just the yellow in you leaking out."

"I did kind of notice somethin' whiz by my ear just now," recalled Ma, by way of easing a situation that threatened to become strained. "It must 'a' come from starboard."

Abner made a hasty step across the deck and peered downward. Dyckman was there descried, artistically absorbed in making a beautiful black stripe end sharply at the edge of a yellow stripe. There was a bucket of very black paint in one hand and a very black brush in the other; nor was there any sign of a yellow brush or of a bucket of yellow paint. There was, however, that yard of bright yellow stripe on the side of the *Judson*, while yonder among the waves appeared a telltale yellowish tinge spreading rapidly and suggesting the presence of a canary-colored cuttlefish. Abner being from off Cape Cod was a man who could put two and two together. He was also a man with a very long reach, and Dyckman was a lad with a rather long pompadour of stiff black hair of which he was inordinately proud. Abner lowered himself noiselessly prone upon the deck, and reaching downward swiftly his long fingers engaged that bristling hirsute growth, relentlessly jerked the unsuspecting artist backward from his narrow plank and let him drop. With a wild whoop that was drowned in a gurgle Dyckman, paintbrush in one hand and paint bucket in the other, disappeared beneath the waves.

"You Yankees is shore some revengeful, ain't you?" observed Ma reproachfully. "Supposin', now, that boy couldn't swim."

"He can swim like a fish," retorted Abner; "which is why I should 'a' knocked him on the head."

Dyckman having abandoned brush and paint to swim to the anchoring buoy sat for a while dripping and meditating revenge before he should start to clamber up the anchor chains to the fo-castle head and dry clothing. Also he wondered if Captain Bradshaw was still in the chart house, whither he had seen him go some five minutes before as he waited and plotted against the peace and dignity of Ma; for if the captain was still in the chart house he might look out and observe Dyckman slipping bedraggled along the fo-castle deck; or descending the ladder from the chart house to his own quarters the captain might even meet the soused and dripping one face to face, when he would be sure to make some remark so scathingly sarcastic that the unfortunate subject thereof must remember it to his expiring day. And Dyckman was sensitive.

Dyckman was also quite right about the whereabouts of the captain, for the latter was at that moment sending a messenger down the ladder in search of one of his chief machinist's mates, Bilge Kennedy by name.

Bilge, mopping the grease and dirt from his face with a scrap of waste, reported as quickly as possible.

Captain Bradshaw, crisp of manner, magnetic of speech and clean of feature, with agate-brown eyes, darted a soul-reading glance at the red-headed master of one of his engine-room watches.

"Kennedy," he said, "as a special compliment to us our British friends are allowing us to take out the new mystery ship, *Tunaloa*. I am to command her. It is a hazardous enterprise — extra-hazardous for the engine-room crew."

"Yes, sir!" said Kennedy, straightening with a sense of new dignity.

Swiftly the captain outlined the project as he saw it, and Bilge listened with growing excitement and the lust for adventure kindling in his breast.

"This is a desperate war, Kennedy," Captain Bradshaw concluded, "and it will be won only by desperate measures. That sort is best carried out by desperate men. Want to go along?"

"I sure do!" gurgled Kennedy, blue eyes shining.

The captain looked relieved. "Pick the men for your watch," he directed, "but every man must know what we are going up against, and must go because he wants to."

"You been invited?" asked the boson's mate, slouching by as Bilge came down from the chart room.

"Yeh!" admitted Bilge laconically.

"Turned it down, I suppose?"

"Turned who down? Bradshaw?"

"Change your mind just like a woman, don't you?" heckled Ma.

"No, I change it like a man," retorted Bilge. "I admit 'at sometimes I am wrong, which you were never known to do. But I wasn't wrong this time. Captain Bradshaw put the scheme to me like it really is, and it listens entirely different from the dime-novel story you was telling. It's just clear cold sense the way he put it — sense and patriotism. Besides, we owe it to our allies. We only got to show these limeys how to do the thing a time or two, and then they can go and do it themselves."

"These limeys requires a lot of showin' according to your idea, don't they, Bilge?" teased Ma.

"Don't they according to yours?"

The question was so straight and blunt that it brought Ma down from the humors of persiflage to questions of conviction.

"They shore do!" he declared emphatically, and shuffled on his way quickly, to conceal the extreme joy with which his heart welcomed Bilge's allegiance to an enterprise the seductive lure of which had already won the adventurous spirit of the Texan.

And so it came to pass that the United States Destroyer *Judson* was denuded of her captain, of one of her chief boson's mates, of one of her chief machinist's mates and a goodly portion of her crew, every last man of whom, it seemed, was clamoring to get his name down on the suicide roll, as they cheerfully called the list Yeoman Newman was making up. And those who remained behind — simply because, with due respect to the rights of other ships in the flotilla, not all could be taken — lined the deck of the *Judson* and gave a brave, lump-swallowing cheer as they saw the "Q" Boat *Tun-aloa* go lumbering out to sea some six days later at the hour of eight o'clock in the evening, when the long twilights of April in this latitude promised yet some hours before darkness.

And the crew of the "Q" cheered back. They knew how they were envied. These men who daily risked life and limb on destroyers engaged in patrol or convoy work were filled with jealousy at the opportunity of their fellows who were going to a duty far more dangerous.

Rationally, intelligently they rejected the assignment to the "Q" boat as the logic of Bilge had rejected it. It was the farthest from a bombproof

job they could imagine. But emotionally, irrationally, vaguely, egged on by some uncharted impulse that rose up within them — something that wasn't logic and yet somehow commended itself as worthy of respect — they wished they were going along. They felt that they belonged. Rather than a V. C. or a Congressional Medal of Honor, each of them would have had a berth on that decrepit ship which, painted to look so smart, was steaming out to offer itself as a target for a torpedo that was going to kill somebody when it exploded, regardless of what happened later. It was a sort of human sacrifice to the gods of war that was about to be offered, but relieved of its horribleness by the element of chance and the opportunity for grips at the throat of a Hun which it promised.

The shades of night fell down at length, but at first they were not heavy shades, for an orange moon had wheeled into a dim-lit sky and paved a shining path across the waters, a path that found its way to a black hull laboring forward heavily, the hull of the "Q" boat, with her clumsy antiquated engines throbbing dully like a tired heart. True to the rules of traffic in wartimes, no lights were showing.

"How long do you expect to pull back and forth here, captain, before we draw a shot?" asked Kirk, the executive officer.

"*Quien sabe?*" answered Bradshaw in the vernacular of those Spanish-American waters in which he had done most of his naval duty. "A week, maybe."

"I'll lay you a little bet," proposed the exec.

"Lay it!"

"A dinner at the Savoy, if we ever see the Savoy again, that we don't draw a shot in a month."

"You're on!" said the captain briefly, absently almost, as he applied a telescope to his eye and for a long moment stood motionless and silent, his close-knit body playing to the wallow of the old ship in the sea. "Thought I saw something shine for a moment way out there in the path of the moon," he remarked presently. "Gad, what luck, Kirk, if we got it to-night!"

"Gives me a kind of creepy feeling," said Kirk, "this idea of being hunted. I can go after 'em in a destroyer all my life and never feel a quiver; but this —"

A small black cloud had rather suddenly overlaid five-sixths of that huge orange moon, and by so much shrouded the sea in a sudden chilling darkness.

"— this waiting for them to hunt us kind of — kind of — gets my goat."

Captain Bradshaw shrugged his shoulders as if he felt the chill. "Oh, I know, but it's just getting used to the idea. After a night or two —"

"Look!" interrupted Kirk. "That cloud on the moon is just the shape of a sub."

"Kind of got 'em on your mind to-night, Kirk, old boy, haven't you?" laughed the captain.

"But it is," argued the executive officer. "You can see his conning tower and his gun — by Jove, it's a big one! — and what looks like men sitting round on the deck, taking the air, just the way they probably are wherever subs are riding on the surface to-night."

Bradshaw laughed again, but not unsympathetically. "Does look a little like it," he admitted. The cloud drifted on and obscured the face of the moon entirely.



"Oh, I'm not scared," assured Kirk.

"At a cloud? Of course not! Besides, any man's liable to get the wind up if he thinks about it. I get it when I think about the boys on watch in the engine room. They're the ones that take the short chance. I've got everybody else sleeping out of danger."

"They're game!" approved Kirk.

"Game? If they weren't I wouldn't think about 'em. Since they don't think for themselves I do it for 'em."

But the captain was wrong; to-night the ratings were all thinking—every man on the ship was thinking, whether he stood at lookout, or marked the pound of the engines, or twisted in his hammock or on a mattress of straw. The newness of the sensation—this particular sensation—made everybody thoughtful. Minds went back across the Atlantic waters to wives or sweethearts or mothers or little children.

Some of these were in tenements of great cities on the Eastern seaboard, where poverty had always stalked, while some were on drives and boulevards or in big country houses, where there was luxury and ease and plenty. Some went back to homes in Appalachian manufacturing towns, and some went on west to the great prairies, and farther still to the giant Rockies and the fecund slopes that go down to the Pacific Ocean. Some minds turned in at broad entrances to wide rich farms, where all wealth of the soil boiled up its plenty, and some turned in at little wind-swept settlers' shanties or climbed narrow cañon trails to clefts in mountains that were almost like eagles' aeries.

So the minds turned back and worshiped at their several memory shrines, thinking and thinking of all the life behind. And whether the past had been rich or poor, love-filled or bleak and empty with only moments of heart happiness, it seemed to each that it had been rather prolific of fine things, and each thought of his own memory treasures longingly. As they looked forward it seemed that, given the old setting and the old opportunity, they could make it very much better, and they decided that they would when the war was over.

The moon crept slowly from behind the cloud.

"Did look kind of like a submarine," conceded the captain again as the last wraith of vapor trailed off the golden face that wheeled higher and higher in the heavens. "My God!"

There was a sudden jar and the ship appeared abruptly to stand still, while a muffled report sounded below and the bridge deck pulsed sharply under their feet.

"We've got it!" said Kirk laconically.

"We have!" exulted Captain Bradshaw. "And the first night out! Great! Great! But where? Well forward of the engine room, don't you think?"

With a touch of the captain's finger electric lights had flashed on all over the ship, and the forms of men leaping up from the deck or pouring from the hatchways appeared, rushing scantily clothed to the lifeboats to form the "panic party." There were shouts and cries and orders hoarsely bawled. There was every simulation of excitement and distress.

Out of this instantaneous turmoil a man came flying to the bridge to report: "Torpedo in forward starboard bunkers."

"Any casualties?" asked the captain anxiously.

"None, sir, but the boiler-room bulkhead is giving way under water pressure."

"Tell Kennedy to take his men out and get to the boats."

"Aye, aye, sir."

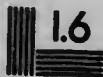
Already a boat was swinging out on the falls and being lowered excitedly, one end going down first — much first — and then the ropes sticking and an apparently frantic man cutting the clogging line and letting the other end of the craft swing free so that it would have spilled its complement into the water if there had been a complement within it. This boat at the disabled fall was abandoned and a second lowered, successfully but with noise and clatter. A third also reached the water safely, with some men already in it and some others sliding swiftly down the ropes. A fourth boat was coming down the falls — a trick boat this, filled in the main with dummies and manned by but four live men — Bilge Kennedy, Ma Ford, Dyckman and Bunnie McIntyre. Bilge and Ma, each something of a leader of men, were doubled up with these dummies, where there was little leading to do, primarily because Executive Officer Kirk knew the penchant of each for the company of the other, and also because he knew that, with the chance of the torpedo what it was, Bilge might never come out of the engine room at all, in which event there would be no duplication of leadership in the dummy boat, for Ma Ford would then king it there with undivided sway.

But Bilge with all his crew had come safely from the engine room, and he threw himself heart and soul into playing his part as a member of the panic



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



4.5



3.0

3.6



4.0

4.5



5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10.0

11.2

12.5

14.0

16.0

18.0

20.0

 **APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482-0300 - Phone  
(716) 288-5989 - Fax

party. His boat, however, encountered difficulties before it reached the water, bringing up on some obstruction with a bump that shook every tooth in Bilge's head and threatened to spill the laboriously prepared dummies into the sea.

"Stop!" shouted Bilge to Dyckman and McIntyre, who were lowering away. "What the blue blazes —"

"Bunker port is open," discerned Ma, peering from his end. "We hit on it."

"Blown open by the explosion, by heck, but still on the hinges," commented Bilge in some wonder, and promptly lowering himself over the side of the boat he stepped on the port and swung it round out of the way, as children ride on a gate. When the boat passed swiftly down again Bilge agilely leaped within and a moment later kicked the patent release which set it free on the waves just as Dyckman and Bunnie came sliding down among the dummies.

"Get her movin'," ordered Bilge, and each of the four bending to an oar they swung off in the wake of the two other boats.

The moon, whether by way of playing her part in the game of deception or because, not understanding, she could no longer bear to look upon a sight like this, rolled behind another shutter of cloud so thick that it shrouded the sea in total darkness, save only for the specks of tail lights on the receding lifeboats and the electric clusters still burning on the *Tunaloa*, which looked empty and deserted as a graveyard.

But this emptiness of appearance as well as the panic was all according to program, according to rehearsal conducted for four afternoons in port,

even to that first boat with the fall rope cut, which swung now so uselessly from one end, like a mute but dramatic witness to shattered inefficient nerves. There was no sound of human presence anywhere about, save, far out, the rhythmic dip of oars, growing fainter and fainter, and that was drowned as steam began to blow off in the boilers of the *Tunaloa*.

Yet the "Q" boat was by no means deserted. Captain Bradshaw, Executive Officer Kirk and every other commissioned officer of the ship were there, waiting motionless or with their movements carefully screened. The gunners were concealed behind their ambushed guns, every muscle tense, every nerve alert, watchful and waiting for signals, while hidden lookouts scanned the black surface of the sea in every direction for a sign of the U-boat; but mostly of course they looked to starboard, for from starboard had come the blow.

Minutes passed and more minutes, and the enemy did not appear. The "Q" boat had settled somewhat in the water and was slowly assuming a lazy list to starboard. There was a smell of something burning too, and presently smoke tingled in the nostrils of Captain Bradshaw till he was put to it to keep from sneezing. Peering out he detected a faint cloud rising from the boiler-room hatch. This was not according to rehearsal. The explosion must have set something on fire — the bunkers probably; still the captain contemplated the prospective conflagration without apprehension. It was one more theatrical "property" of an abandoned ship; so he waited.

But the U-boat was slow in appearing — very,

very slow. It was cautious — very, very cautious and canny. There was, however, nothing for the men on board to do but wait stubbornly. Months of hard work and thousands in money had been spent in getting the *Tunaloa* ready for her task. Now the trap had been baited, it was all ready to spring, and no impatient move of those ambushed on board must defeat the purpose.

So Captain Bradshaw crouched and peered; but the smell of smoke grew stronger. A speaking tube at his elbow rumbled and the captain applied an ear.

"The fire is making headway, sir!" reported the voice of Abner Anderson, in charge of the port waist gun.

"Can you get to it without exposing yourself on the deck?"

"No, sir."

"Then hold fast. Don't let a man move. Not one!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The captain returned to his scanning of the dark. "If only that fellow would come up and give us the once over!" he grumbled, when the speaking tube's depths were agitated again and the same voice of Abner Anderson was heard, but this time somewhat less even in its tenor.

"Have you thought of the magazine, sir?" it inquired.

"How far is the fire from the magazine?"

"About thirty feet, sir; but it might be a good deal closer. It's kind of eating along out of sight."

"Lay low and stick it out!" ordered the captain sharply.

"All right, sir," answered Abner; but there was



anxiety in his voice, Abner being by nature an anxious soul.

Meanwhile Bilge and Ma had rowed away obediently but grouchily according to their enlisted-man natures.

"Blast that open port!" grumbled Bilge. "Come pretty near makin' me break my back."

"Come might I h makin' me knock my teeth out on the gunnel," bleated Ma plaintively.

"Got the old whale in the water, though, and all my cargo of precious dummies," reflected Bilge with the satisfaction of duty well performed. "Set up there, you corpse, and look like a man!" And Kennedy desisted from his oar long enough to shoot a right hook into a bag of shavings incased in dungarees and with a knob at the top supposed to represent a human head. "Set up there, I tell you!" And he seized the manikin by the scruff of its manikin neck and braced the slouching thing on the seat.

So they rowed away, but not quite according to instructions. The three boats had been directed to keep together, but the boat of Bilge and Ma, of Bunnie and Dyckman, fell farther and farther behind the tail lights of the two others, and the glance of the chief machinist's mate rested more and more longingly on the spots and specks of brightness behind him that told where the old *Tunaloa* squatted and tilted lower and lower in the water. Bilge's strokes, too, became less and less determined, more and more casual. Presently they stopped altogether. McIntyre, whose oar complemented his also stopped.

"What's the matter?" inquired Ma; and his gaze was also bent backward toward the "Q" boat.

76      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

"I can't bear running away from her, old girl," confessed Bilge moodily.

"We was to row right on off," reminded the old girl, like the voice of conscience she sometimes was.

"We're far off as I want to be," said Bilge. "Besides, with the moon covered up like that the sun can't see us. She figures 'at we have gone."

Ma's silence seemed to give assent to this hypothesis.

"I never did run away from a fight before," remarked Bilge, noting this passive attitude of Ma's and taking courage from it.

"Me neither," said Ma mournfully. "Tain't in my Texas nature."

"We got to obey orders, haven't we?" warned Bunnie McIntyre.

"We sure have," argued Dyckman.

"Ma!" proposed Bilge out of the silence that had been allowed to follow Dyckman's remark. "Let's go back!"

"Row back and give the whole snap away?" protested Bunnie.

"Swim back, you infant in arms," growled Bilge.

"Swim?" inquired Ma meditatively, the note of mild interrogation in her voice showing that the old girl actually contemplated the possibility.

"It ain't more'n half a mile. We can do it in fifteen minutes or twenty, and take it easy all the way."

"But how'd we get on the boat?"

"That open bunker port."

"And what good do you allow we could do, even if we got back there?" Ma asked, not by way of making objection but as if he argued with himself.

"We'd kind of be round if anything happened," reasoned Bilge with exceeding wistfulness in his voice. "We've got one job off our hands and if we would get back there Satan might find some other useful work for our idle hands to do."

Ma thrust a hand into the water.

"Ain't more than fifty-two," he commented.

"Warmer'n the air, anyway," said Bilge; "so we won't feel the cold."

"Say! You two mutts are not going to leave us alone out here in the middle of the Irish Sea with a shipload of dummies and a submarine cruisin' round and liable to come up in the middle of us any minute," protested Bunnie. "If you go back we go back. Don't you suppose Dyckman and me have got just as big an itch to be in that fracas as anybody?"

"You got to obey orders," retorted Bilge inexorably. "I and Ma outrates you, and we order you to take them dummies and get along with 'em. Don't we, Ma?"

Ma was at the moment divesting himself of his shirt in the time-honored way and therefore could not reply immediately. "We shore do and they shore have," he remarked eventually; and clad very much as Nature had slipped him into an unsuspecting world he lowered himself into the sea.

"I'll set right here," declared Bunnie stubbornly, "and both of you big bluffers will come paddlin' back here in about five minutes. You both got too big a streak of yellow in you to go cruisin' round on your chins in this water at midnight."

"Yeh, Bun, you got us right," observed Ma with considerable dry irony for a man immersed in so

much wet water. "We'll be back dreckly. You sort of hang round for us — understand?" And his features grimaced derisively in the rays of the tail light.

McIntyre and Dyckman sneered while Bilge and Ma began in long powerful strokes to fin their way in the direction of the *Tunaloa* through a sea that was calm and all but waveless. Both could swim like porpoises, and they made their way forward side by side with an occasional low-toned remark, and had covered perhaps one-third the distance when Bilge turned over on his back with a grunt of pain, and drawing up his left toe gathered it into the soothing clasp of his big right hand.

"I kicked my foot on something," he complained.

"You mutt! What you got out here to kick your feet on?" chided Ma. "You just interfered with yourself."

Ma had stopped swimming, however, and was treading water while he contemplated dimly the somewhat contorted face of Bilge a few feet from him.

"I tell you," Bilge began to argue, and was just then surprised into silence, for the benevolently reproving features of Ma Ford had been suddenly removed from their place upon the surface of the water as if plucked under by some unseen hand.

Bilge struck out quickly in the direction of this disappearance, and was rewarded by the return of Ma, who came up sputtering.

"Somethin' fouled me!" he explained, blowing salt water from his mouth and shaking it from his ears. "Many's the time I've run into my mammy's clothesline in the dark out in the backyard at Waco,

but this is sure the first time I ever run into one in the Irish Sea."

It was Bilge's turn to be scornful.

"You —" he began; and suddenly the power of speech departed from him and his eyes became fixed and staring. A thing like a post, standing upright, had appeared between them and moved sluggishly past, the measured rate of its progress producing a very slight eddy behind it.

"For the love of Mike!" Bilge breathed solemnly as the upright object describing a lazy arc in the water slowly passed round them.

"A peeriscope!" decided Ma. "Well, I ain't sorry. I been kind of lookin' for a tow anyhow," and he demonstrated at once the imperturbability of his colossal calm and the volume of his assurance by throwing a loving arm about the "peeriscope," succeeding which he experienced the pleasant sensation of being drawn slowly through the water.

"Pinching a ride on a submarine!" gasped Bilge in the most sincere tribute of admiration he had ever paid to Ma's presence of mind.

A yard or so behind the first upright there appeared a smaller and shorter post, and to this Bilge with a vigorous stroke or two now annexed himself.

"They must 'a' been lyin' on the bottom, and comin' up his jump wire fouled my feet," speculated Ma.

"Say," inquired Bilge awesomely as he gazed toward the top of the forward post, which was lost somewhere above him, "can these things hear and see too?"

"I don't allow they can," decided Ma after a

moment of reflection; "and as long as we keep close they can't see us."

"I'm huggin' her like I do that black-eyed girl up on the hill," chuckled Bilge, rapidly recovering his own self-possession.

"Strikes me kind of funny!" And he laughed nervously.

"It shore is!" chortled Ma. "Oh, if Waco could only see us now!"

"Wha' would those guys down below say if they knew we were taking a ride on 'em?" inquired Bilge, still fascinated by the novelty of the situation.

"Look! They're circlin' the *Tunaloa* and drawin' in closer," observed Ma.

"Yeh! They'll put us off at the bunker port directly," suggested Bilge joyously.

"I've let down. I'm standing on the conning tower," said Ma presently.

"You haven't got none the best of me. I'm standing on one too," reported Bilge triumphantly. "What do you figure the old sea serpent is doing?"

"Oh, I allow he's got his suspicions of that 'Q' boat," said Ma airily; "and he's goin' to give him a mighty good lookin' over. He'll raise directly, though, if them boys on board just keeps still long enough."

"And when he rises what'll you do?" inquired Bilge just as jubilantly as if he would not himself thereby be placed in the same delicate and embarrassing position.

"Why, then," said Ma coolly, "I'm a-goin' to get me a Hun prisoner for a souvenir. I allus have wanted one of them things to take home."

"And you haven't had nothing to drink, either," reproached Bilge, stifling his amazement.

"Nothing but about two quarts of Irish Sea when this here marine clothesline drug me under."

"How you figure to get a German?" Bilge inquired further, when Ma had relapsed into one of his dignified silences.

"Easy as fiddlin'," declared Ma. "When they open this hatch for a good look at close quarters I'm goin' to be behind it, and when one of these fellers comes up I'm just going to jujutsu him a little so he'll be nice and unconscious, and drag him off into the water with me. We're makin' about four knots now, and that'll carry us astern so that when the next guy comes out he'll just naturally figure that the first sausage fell overboard."

"Got it all figured out, haven't you, Ma?" derided Bilge; but for an interval thereafter he also was thoughtful.

"I'm a-goin' to get me one too," he announced directly.

"Le's don't be a durned hog," argued Ma more seriously as upon further excogitation he admitted to himself that the project might be attended with serious difficulties. "Le's get just one together. We can manage him in the water and keep him afloat all right till we get to the 'Q' with him."

While the two men talked and plotted the submarine had swerved in sharply till she was no more than two hundred yards from the wounded *Tunaloa*, and both men turned their eyes upon the old ship curiously.

"Hell's bells! She's afire!" ejaculated Bilge. "I can see smoke."

Ma withheld comment and peered intently.

"I can't see smoke," he announced presently; "and you couldn't make it out if smoke was there."

"I smell it," argued Bilge. "That old pill landed in her bunkers and it's just about set her on fire."

"If it is they'll have to break cover directly to put the fire out," regretted Ma.

"They will, hey?" inquired Bilge a trifle fiercely. "What's the matter with us putting that fire . . . We come off here for some good purpose, didn't we? The minute those fellows move they give their snap away; and they won't do it. They'll just about burn up first."

"Come on," said Ma. "We're on the starboard side now."

The two men let go their grip upon the periscopes and swam swiftly to the black hull, making their way to the open bunker port at about the time when they judged the submarine would be well out of sight on the port side.

"I can't reach it," muttered Bilge after a desperate try, but by further violent effort he managed to get one set of fingers on the ledge of the open port, and by taking advantage of the buoyancy in Ma's body also, he got a full-hand grip and a moment later was in the port.

"Jumping beeswax!" he cried under his breath as, standing barefooted in the slacked coal of the bunker, a thousand sharp points were penetrating his tender soles. Extending a helping hand to Ma he pulled him in after, and a moment later the two men, naked except for the thinnest and most abbreviated of underwear, stood erect in the bunker, tak-



ing stock of the situation, while little rivulets of water trickled down to make mud of the dust in which their feet sank ankle deep.

"Hotter'n Hades!" announced Bilge, sniffing.

"Ouch!" He had laid an incautiously inquiring hand on the steel ceiling above him, which was also the steel floor of the upper bunker. "Red hot, by heck! Fire's in that bunker up there."

"I allowed it was," confessed the voice of Ma, sepulchral in the confined blackness of the coal hole.

"What do we do next?" he inquired, passing up the practical question to Bilge.

"We dig our way into the engine room, bend on a line of steam hose and put the fire out."

"Would there be steam?" questioned Ma. "I heard the boilers blowin' off when we was rowin' away."

"Sure you did! That was the safety valve; and as soon as the pressure was reduced they stopped blowing off. I looked at the gauges last thing, and there was plenty of water in the boilers too."

Groping forward in the darkness they came to a jagged glowing line in the ceiling above them.

Peering up through the crack a red heart of fire was discernible.

"That's where the splinter of torpedo went up through this bunker and set that one to burning."

"Wonder it didn't set something afire down below."

"Probably did, but the water she took in put it out."

"My God, what must it be doin' to the gun crew, right over it!" said Ma solemnly. "It ain't so far from the magazines, neither."

"And not a man moving," commented Bilge. "You know, Ma, you got to have respect for men like that — men that ain't afraid of nothing — men that'll just stick there and let their bloomin' heads be blown off, but what they'll 'carry on,' as these limeys say. Come! We got to be quick."

"But how you goin' to get in the engine room?" objected Ma. "I don't see that it's done we-all any partickler good to get into this coal cellar that's a hundred and fifty degrees hotter than any place I ever been in my life before."

"Going to dig in through the stokehole right here. It's somewhere round."

And Bilge feeling his way forward from the port groped to the other side across the uneven hills and valleys of loose coal.

"It's somewhere here," he decided; and sinking to his knees began to scratch violently at the coal, drawing it out sometimes in lumps and sometimes in soft handfuls of slack and dust.

"Quick, Ma!" he urged. "We got to paw our way through four feet of coal at least."

"You're chokin' me," protested Ma, who found himself enveloped in a cloud of dust.

"They're just about burnin' up on that starboard waist gun deck," panted Bilge; and Ma, who despite protestations had groped his way to a place beside the chief machinist's mate, sank to his knees and began feverishly to claw back the coal from the opening.

In a minute the place was full of suffocating, irritating powder that worked its way into eyes, ears, hair and the pores of their soaking skins. This, added to the heat from the fire smoldering

overhead, served to make the situation still more unbearable, but the two scratched on frantically, letting themselves in deeper and deeper, and then dragging their bodies for brief intervals to the open port, where they hung exhausted on the sill to gulp in reviving breaths of outer air.

"Hear anything from up above?" inquired Bilge as they hung over the sill.

"No," decided Ma after a listening moment.

"Ain't they the game devils, though!" admired Bilge. "See anything of the sub?"

"See? Say, yo're plumb crazy, Bilge! My eyes is that full of coal dust I cain't even see the dark." So they returned to their digging.

"I've found the stokehole, all right," reported Bilge, reaching down. "Keep on scrabbling out."

As their hole deepened, however, they had to widen it. This necessitated more yardage excavated — as they used to say down in Panama — and more pilgrimages to the open port.

"I wisht we had started sooner," gasped Ma. "Them boys has got to quit up there before we ever get our chore done at all, and that's just about goin' to break their hearts — Dick Dorgan's especially."

"Has old Dick got the starboard gun?" inquired Bilge anxiously. "Well, then, I'm just naturally going to dive out through the stokehole this time and get something started."

"Lenime go first," argued Ma as they returned to their digging. "I'm thinner'n you."

"Nope! You're not no account when you get out there, because you're a boson and not a machinist. I'm the one that's got to go through first."

86      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

Maybe we haven't got time to let you out at all yet, Ma."

By this time they were again in the craterlike dent they had made in the coal, leading down to the stoke spout, through which bit of smothering blackness it was Bilge's proposal now to crawl.

"I can see out. I can see light in the boiler room," he announced as he lowered himself head first, worming and twisting downward and forward at the same time that he tried to make of his limbs and body a barrier for the sifting streams of dust and slack which in the darkness continually drifted down upon him.

"I'm going in," he panted back. "I got my hands out in the boiler room now. Hullly gee! They're in water. I'll have to dive, sure enough. You got to keep the coal from wedgin' in round me, Ma, so's I don't get stuck in the hole with half of me in and half of me out and my head under water. Savvy?"

"I savvy," declared Ma grimly, who had worked down to a position where his body was cribbing back the coal his hands were pawing out. "There, darn you, Bilge; I always did want to kick you good and plenty, and now I got the chance. I only wish I had hobnailed boots on instead of my bare and tender feet."

Bilge chuckled responsively. "All right! So long!" he called.

It may not be written that his head disappeared, for neither had been able to glimpse the form of the other in this abysmal blackness; but the sudden muffling of Bilge's voice indicated that he had inserted his head and shoulders into the chute, and

Ma, marking by the sense of touch the progress of his comrade's body, eventually applied both his feet in a healthy boost downward and knew as the flesh beneath them squirmed and yielded that Bilge was making headway. Suddenly there was nothing human beneath Ma's feet, and an interval of silence and uncertainty followed that to the boson's mate was very long.

"All right!" trumpeted a drowned voice. "I've made it. You keep scrabblin' the coal back, because it takes a bigger hole for me to come back through with the tools."

"Sure thing," responded Ma; "but pass me a fan and a glass of ice water."

Bilge, however, was not there to hear this particular bit of airy persiflage. He had not thought it necessary to mention to Ma that he had found three feet of water in the boiler rooms, and was now making his way, up to his waist in a filthy fluid, through the tunnel that ran between the boilers to the water-tight door leading to the engine room. To open that door would let a flood of water go streaming over its sill, but the engine room might as well flood as the boiler room if the old hooker was to burn or blow up, and Bilge boldly undid the door and stepped over through a pouring Niagara. His first care was a glance at the steam gauge.

"Thirty pounds! It's enough," he croaked joyously, and made his way to where the steam hose was kept. It would be a long stretch, but there was enough of it, he decided, and began swiftly to couple it on. He next located a nested electric light with a line of portable cord sufficient to carry illumination from the boiler-room plug to the bunker,

and was starting back when the sight of the speaking tube suggested that he might communicate to Captain Bradshaw that succor was at hand.

The captain at the moment was in a most painful state of suspense, and hesitating between one form of duty and another. He still crouched doggedly watching the sea and cursing the blanket of cloud that swallowed the moon completely, while Executive Officer Kirk hovered over the speaking tubes, alternately receiving reports and pleading with his men to hold out.

"You smell leather burning?" inquired the voice of Dorgan from his starboard waist gun. Kirk sniffed doubtfully, a sniff that was recorded only as silence at the other end of the tube.

"That's our shoes," signified Dorgan.

"Hold out a little longer," pleaded Kirk.

"Tell him to hold out for fifteen minutes longer — for the honor of the American Navy," said Captain Bradshaw eagerly to Kirk, and his own lips were so close to the tube that Dorgan heard it direct.

"This gun crew'll be nothin' but cinders in fifteen minutes," he reported stolidly; "but we'll hold out for that. Darn us, we'll hold out!"

"On the bridge! On the bridge!"

The cry echoed hoarsely from the mouth of one of the battery of speaking tubes into the confined space where the captain and his executive officer stewed in their own anxiety. Kirk answered the port-gun tube.

"Did you call?"

"No, sir," came the sullen voice of Abner Anderson, who had long since resigned himself to a horrible death.

"On the bridge! On the bridge!" barked the echo impatiently.

Kirk looked surprised. The voice seemed to issue from the engine-room tube. But there was nobody in the engine room.

"On the bridge!" wailed the tube, pleadingly this time.

Kirk, his voice trembling as if a ghost had spoken to him, shouted "Bridge!" and applied his ear to the engine-room tube.

"Can you hold out ten minutes, sir?"

"Who are you?" exclaimed the astonished captain, who had elbowed Kirk away from the tube.

"Kennedy, sir; and Ford."

"How did you get here?"

The captain's voice blazed out wild with wrath and anger that disobedience to orders threatened to force the surrender of the project in the very moment when so many of his men had reached the limit of suffering to make it good.

"Swum over, sir. The submarine didn't see us, sir. We got in through the starboard bunker port."

"The submarine?" exclaimed the captain avidly.

"There's one about, sir," reported Kennedy.

"Ford and me rode over on it, hanging to the periscope, sir. She's circling you a hundred yards off with about six feet of periscope showing and getting ready to come up."

"Are you crazy?"

"I ain't got no time to argue that now, sir," said Kennedy, but with tone still beseechingly respectful.

"I think you'll get the sub, sir, if you can hold out, for she's awful curious. She's bound to broach soon if she ain't broaching now."

"How did you get in that engine room?" demanded the captain, still outraged by this unexpected presence.

"Dug through the stokehole, sir. I'm going back now with a line of hose. We'll have live steam on that fire in five minutes. At first the decks will get hotter, but the fire will be killed, and I thought maybe if you could hold out, sir, fifteen or twenty —"

Captain Bradshaw rather choked up for a moment, as if it were his throat and not Bilge's that was full of coal dust.

"Hold out? Say! We can hold out two hours for fellows like you. Stop jabbering there now, and go ahead!"

"And it was him doing all the jabbering," explained Bilge later. "I just wanted to let him know that we was there and the submarine was too."

"It's those two wild men, Kennedy and Ford," Captain Bradshaw reported to Kirk with a great gulp in his voice. "They've got over here somehow and they're working on that fire. Tell the gun crews, and warn them that the submarine is still hanging about sure."

Captain Bradshaw sank into his normal crouch again, rather overcome by a reflex of unusual emotions.

"I could go through hell with such men," he murmured.

But Kirk didn't hear this. He was already at the speaking tube hustling the news down first of all to Dorgan, and then to Abner Anderson, whose crew, though not suffering so much from heat, were all but suffocated by the smoke that seeped and purled from every seam beneath them, so that the



men bent close against their canvas screen, fanning themselves and fighting for every breath of air that they could gain.

"Well, whaddaya think of that?" rasped Dorgan to his crew. "We got to stay here now. Them darned nuts, Bilge and Ma, have swum back here from the boats, crawled in through the bunker port and are putting out the fire."

"It's about time," moaned Jurgenson. "I'm gettin' done on one side. Somebody's got to turn me, but look out or I'll stick to the frying pan."

"We got to stay here now if we burn to cracklin's," growled Dorgan.

"I'm cracklings now," reported Jimmie Roser.

"Keep shuffling, everybody," ordered Dorgan in one of his fiercest stage whispers. "First one foot down and then the other; then one hand —"

"As if we hadn't all been doing that," said Jimmie, who was a nice boy and seldom trapped into any ungrammatical form of expression, even by the most exciting or distressing incidents.

"I've danced on my toes and on my heels — I've fox-trotted a million miles with my knees and elbows the last fifteen minutes. Ouch!"

Jimmie in his writhings had rolled the side of his neck against a brass shell case as it stood in the ammunition rack.

"My Lord, Dick!" he exclaimed to Dorgan. "Those shells are getting hot. They're liable to explode."

Dorgan thrust out an experimental hand and drew it back quickly.

"Every man take a shell in his arms and hold it," he ordered.

There were seven men in the crew; there were eight shells in the rack. Dorgan himself took two. The outer surfaces were so hot they could not be retained in the bare hands without discomfort. It was necessary to pull down rolled-up sleeves and get the fabric between the metal and the bare arms, and then to keep tossing or rolling them and bringing fresh surfaces to bear all the time.

And so the men of the starboard crew endured, for the sake of the game they played, minute after minute, stooping low in their canvas housings, dancing and shuffling noiselessly to keep their feet from burning, and juggling each man a shell in his arms, while Dickie Dorgan juggled two.

Captain Bradshaw on the bridge strained his eyes for a glimpse of the submarine, as did every lookout, but the moon continued obdurate and unhelpful. A thousand shapes that might have been periscopes flitted ghostlike across the blackened waters, but none became real and tangible. And as the lookouts strained their eyes they also strained their ears for a sound — a ripple in the water — a slight splash that would tell of seas rolling from a suddenly lifted ledge of submarine decking, for the grate of a hatch cover when it opened or a sound of guttural voices — anything that would hint the direction in which the submarine was lurking and help them to discern that shadowy target.

Kirk, listening at the hydrophone, was trying for the hundredth time to pick up the beat of her propellers, but the instrument functioned poorly tonight. Now it brought to his ears only a confusion of sound and a faint clink-clink-clink, that was not in the least like the beat of propellers.

"What do you make out, captain?" he said, passing the earpiece over.

The captain, too, caught that faint clink-clink, and he recognized it.

"That's Kennedy and Ford," he said, "hammering a way through the bottom of that steel bunker for their steam nozzle. They're working like demons, and probably just about burning themselves up. They've got the bunker port closed to keep the sound from giving us away to the submarine, because we don't hear the sound from outside, which shows they've still got their heads about 'em. Tell Dorgan the steam will be on the fire in two minutes."

Kirk called Dorgan and pleaded with him to hold out.

"I'm awfully sorry to ask it of you," said the exec. "I can smell that leather burning now all right."

"'Tain't leather this time," replied Dorgan. "It's us. We can hold out a spell, but tell them birds down there to hurry."

And the birds below were hurrying. In the dim glow of an electric light a tall wiry scarecrow of a man, sweat-sopped and black as coal from head to foot, with a tousele of hair hanging about his eyes, stood ramming and twisting the nozzle of the steam hose into the rip the torpedo splinter had made in the steel floor of the upper bunker. The atmosphere was hotter than ever, because, as Captain Bradshaw had divined, Ma had closed the bunker door to screen his light from the possible view of the submarine; and while he worked red-hot coals, large and small, sifted down upon his bare hand or found lodg-

ment in his hair, in the angle of his elbows and in the sweating hollows about his shoulders and clavicles.

Bilge, after passing the nozzle and light through the stokehole to his partner, waded back through the passage between the boilers, entered the engine room once more and turned on the steam. But despite his great haste he did this very gradually, having regard to the safety of his comrade, the chief boson's mate, for a sudden expansion due to discharge of steam into the close quarters of the upper bunker might cause a sagging downward of the breached floor and precipitate some tons of glowing coals upon the beloved head of Ma.

Ma meanwhile braced himself with the first hiss into the smouldering mass above his head, leaning as far back as possible from the trickling line of danger. Instantly a dull roar broke out above him, and as the volume of steam increased the volume of this roar enlarged; but the bunkers kept the sound shut tightly in, while the great force of the steam drove its watery vapors irresistibly through the bunker, yard by yard, swiftly taming the conflagration.

But it is the nature of steam that it passes into vapor and the vapor condenses into water, and rivulets of this water, scalding hot, came questing down the nozzle, over the layer of leather which enveloped it to protect the holding hands, and on to the naked flesh of Ma.

"Holy Moses!" he ejaculated, and involuntarily slacked the hold of one hand upon the nozzle and shook it, repeating the process with the other.

Meanwhile Bilge was again at the speaking tube

in the engine room and Captain Bradshaw answered his call.

"The steam is on the fire, sir!" reported Bilge.

"Thank God!" said Captain Bradshaw fervently.

"Are you sure the sub —"

But Bilge was gone, carrying a section of jute matting found floating in the engine-room wash, for he had foreseen what those scalding trickling streams would be doing to the unprotected hands of Ma.

"Steam's on," reported Kirk to Dorgan.

"Thank God!" said Dorgan also, and added:

"The nails in our shoes are terrible good conductors."

"If only now —" muttered Captain Bradshaw; and his eyes roved again to the darkened circle outside the ship, when a sharp crack came out of the blackness, followed by a thud and an explosion that sent a vibratory thrill through the entire length of the *Tunaloa*. For an instant, too, a flash of light had appeared.

"Submarine firing on us — two hundred yards — starboard beam!"

"Let her have it!" shouted Captain Bradshaw to the bow gun in the monkey house above him.

But Dorgan had seen that flash as quick as the captain, and with a few turns of the wheels his gun was training on the spot just as the searchlight on the monkey house unmasked itself, felt about on the sea for a moment with her long proboscis of light, and then spotted with steady beam the conning towers, upper works and a goodly section of the decks of a submarine well up above the surface of the sea.

... went Dorgan's gun.

Bang! went bow and stern guns almost together. Bang! in a moment from Dorgan's gun again, while the bow and stern guns followed, all three pouring shot after shot into this generous target at a point-blank range.

The underwater craft was so surprised and overwhelmed that she returned but one answering futile shot, and thereafter afforded only a sort of moving picture of men staggering back from their gun, scuttling for open hatches, and of conning towers that shivered and reeled under the impact of shell on shell until abruptly an explosion came, when the watchers on the *Tunaloa* saw their victim tear apart, heave up 'in the center and go down in two pieces, with jagged ends of metal and various protruding entrails of a submarine hanging in the light for a moment and then settling beneath the black agitated waters.

A hoarse cheer of victory broke from the parched throats on the "Q" boat as Dorgan and his men leaped from their gun station to seek cooler spots along the deck, or pulling off their scorching shoes rushed for the water taps. Captain Bradshaw left the bridge and came tearing down among them. Dorgan's crew saw him coming and stood at attention.

"Good work! Wonderful work, men!" the captain exclaimed, and for a moment was stiff and straight, returning their salute.

"But for heaven's sake, look after yourselves! Here, surgeon! Give their feet instant attention."

Captain Bradshaw stepped to the side and stood again watching intently the turmoil in the water where the U-boat had gone threshing to her death.

Marvelous as it seemed that anything could live under such a fire and through such an explosion as had just torn the submarine apart, some human forms appeared, struggling in the water.

"Get a boat out quick, and pick those fellows up!" ordered the captain.

There was a rush for the falls and for the single remaining boat, which was the one that had dangled dramatically and alone.

Launching it proved difficult, and the gun crew were not so expert at getting boats away as they had been at smashing the submarine with shell fire. Eventually, however, they got the boat into the water, and with this concern off his mind the captain lethought him suddenly of something else and dashed toward the engine room. He found it a wreck. That first single effective shell of the submarine had struck there and exploded.

With misgivings in his breast the captain was hurrying downward on a twisted and trembling ladder when two wretched-looking nondescripts appeared, wading in from the boiler room.

They were nearly as naked as when they were born and were coated with slime to the water's edge, the only exposed parts of their bodies which were not black being the hands and arms that had been washed and reddened by the drip of scalding water from the steam nozzle. Their bedraggled and soot-soaked hair hung down over their foreheads in a dejected fringe, through which eyes popped out in startled surprise at the sight of the captain.

Instinctively the two saluted.

"Fire's almost out, sir," reported Bilge. "We'd have had it all out, sir, but the steam went back on

us just now. Wha-what!" And Bilge suddenly recognized what the captain's presence there must mean. "You—you quit!" he reproached. "What'd you quit for? Those gunners could 'a' held out a while longer."

"'Pears like we-all burned ourselves up for nothin', Bilge," remarked Ma dejectedly, holding up his red and scalded hands and gazing at them reflectively; and the volume of reproach which had been in Bilge's tones was as nothing to the oceans of it in Ma's. "Them gunners must 'a' laid down on you, captain."

For a moment Captain Bradshaw was indignant and resentful, and then the truth dawned on him.

"Do you mean to say you didn't hear?" he inquired.

"Couldn't hear nothing, captain, in that bunker with the steam roaring and bellowing above our heads—nothing! But say"—and Bilge stared about him—"it looks like something happened in here since I went back to the bunker."

"We got the submarine," assured Captain Bradshaw joyously.

"Got her?" asked Bilge, dazed and wondering. "How? When?"

"Just now. Blew her all to pieces."

"Well, I'm gummed!" confessed Bilge, groping for the ladder.

"Couldn't hear nothin' at all in that bunker," insisted Ma stubbornly.

"The submarine must have been lying round for an hour, too cautious to board us and too curious to go away," explained the captain. "I suppose



she didn't want to shell us and give warning of her presence and position. Probably lying for the mail boat. But at last she let us have a shell. Looks as if it landed here."

"That's what went wrong with our steam pressure all at once," accounted Bilge.

"Our boys fell on her like a volcano," concluded the captain. "Shot her all to pieces and she blew up. You fellows saved us. But for you we should have had to give up and we shouldn't have got the sub at all."

"Got the sub?" echoed Ma querulously, as if the idea of a whole climactic series of events taking place within the last few minutes without his ken was quite impossible.

"Yes," assured the captain, amused at such incredulity. "A boat's crew is now out looking for survivors."

This connected up with another idea still eddying round in Ma's dizzy mind.

"That reminds me," he said weakly to Bilge, like a man waking out of a delirium; "we was goin' to get us a Hun off that boat. We was —"

Ma's voice trailed off into nothingness, and wabbling somewhat womanishly on her legs the old girl just crumpled up and sat down, done up completely. Bilge reached for his friend, but was himself too weak to stay the fall, and with a tired gasp Ma disappeared beneath the surface of the water on the engine-room floor.

Captain Bradshaw leaped past Bilge, felt about for a moment in the black flood, lifted the limp figure of Ma and threw him coughing and spluttering desperately over his shoulder.

100      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

"Can you get up alone, Kennedy?" he inquired. "You fellows must have worked to complete exhaustion."

"Yes, sir, I can get up. Old Ma's burned some, I got a suspicion, though he hasn't more than admitted it to me."

The captain carried the dripping, fainting form of Ford to the open space on the deck abaft the bridge, and turned him over to the ship's surgeon; but Ma was already conscious and covered with confusion when he found his soil and dish-rag frame being tenderly lowered to the deck in the arms of the captain of the ship.

"Look after this man, too, Eckert," said the captain, pointing to Kennedy. "They're half suffocated, and both burned, I suspect."

The captain turned away to watch the raising of the boat, which was now coming up the falls amid shouts and jeers.

"One survivor!" sang out a voice, and Ma, still prostrate on the deck, with his head in Bilge's lap and the chief pharmacist's mate coddling him with brandy while the surgeon applied picric acid to his burns, heard it.

"Is this yere a dead survivor or a live one?" he inquired, half sitting up.

A laugh ran round the deck.

"A live one!" exulted the captain.

"Bring 'im here! Bring 'im here! I want to set my eyes on him," demanded Ma. "I was a-goin' to get me a Hun myself off that boat, but I had to knock off and do something else."

The whole ship was in a mind to humor Ma, and they brought to him presently a fat-faced, sodden,

graceless figure of a man with suspicious eyes, pursed lips and a frown of stubborn defiance.

"Bring him close," said Ma. "I want to see what one of these yere submarine hounds is like anyway." The chief boson's mate lifted himself on one elbow and stared at the fellow interestedly until suddenly a light of recognition broke on his face.

"Gosht almighty!" he gasped. "If it ain't Dutchy, the butcher's boy from Waco! Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Dutchy? Ain't you, now? A-goin' about torpedoin' unarmed ships and murderin' women and children and little babies?"

Ma's small dark eyes bored into the blue impudent ones of the prisoner, but the blue eyes refused any look of recognition, and they gave back to Ma his stare, accompanying it with a disdainful curl of the lip.

"Ain't you, now?" he demanded incredulously.

"No! No, you ain't," he decided after a minute.

"I remember, now, you was always a-pesterin' and torturin' things, tyin' cans to dogs' tails, stickin' pins in horses to make 'em jump, stonin' cats and chickens, and makin' everything unhappy generally.

And once you cut my pa's cow's tail off, just because she chased you when you was teasin' her calf. Didn't you, Dutchy? And I licked time out of you for that, didn't I, Dutchy?"

"Take him away!" said Captain Bradshaw shortly.

So they took Dutchy away and left Ma to be assisted to his feet and escorted below, where with water to wash him clean and broth for his inner man they sought to make him comfortable, while the boats in the panic party were returning and being

102      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

hauled squeakily up the davits. Next day a tug towed the *Tunaloa* back inside the harbor and Ma and Bilge were among those on deck and picking up familiar sights along the quay, where Mrs. Murphy, godmother of the *Judson's* enlisted men, was vigorously waving a tablecloth by way of welcome home from their brief but eventful trip.

"I don't want no more cruises in a 'Q' boat," said Ma.

"Me neither," decided Bilge. "I wouldn't 'a' gone on this one if you hadn't schemed and got me into it."

"Me?" inquired Ma with a hurt look on her placid patient features.

"Yes, you!"

And the two stared at each other with looks of mutual reproach and recrimination.

### III

#### KIDNAPING CUPID

WHEN Capt. Woodes Rogers set sail from Hull, England, in 1708, on that memorable privateering expedition to the South Seas in the course of which he rescued Alexander Selkirk from his desert isle and thus gave Robinson Crusoe to fiction and to fame, his first outward-bound stop was made at an Irish port to careen his ships, to tallow their bottoms and to attend to certain other slight refittings. After continuing on his journey that observing navigator noted in his diary the "strange behavior of our men there, that they were continually marrying whilst we staid there."

Two hundred and ten years later a commander of an American destroyer flotilla has had occasion to base his ships at a port in this same land, and he, too, has remarked a strange flowering of the conjugal spirit. His men display a penchant for marrying. This fact has occasioned the commander some annoyance, and has been prolific of anxiety, embarrassment and regret to fathers and mothers on both sides of the Atlantic. In consequence, advisers of many sorts and degrees — spiritual, official, diplomatic and personal-friend advisers — have intervened or sought to intervene when symptoms of an outbreak of matrimonial contagion manifested themselves in any particular individual.

When rumor had it that Little Benny Riley, first-class yeoman on the United States Destroyer *Judson*,

104      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

was about to perpetrate one of these international entanglements, his shipmates, Bilge Kennedy and Ma Ford, both set out to erect barbed wire across the pathway to connubial bliss.

"We just naturally got to save Benny from himself," averred Bilge, looking up from tinkering the engine of the motor dory.

"Benny is a trustin', confidin' little lamb of a yeoman that any schemin' damsel could pull the wool over his eyes without half tryin'," agreed Ma, who leaned against the gunwale where the dory swung upon the davits ready to be lowered to the placid waters of the bay the moment Bilge should pronounce her fit.

"'Course," considered Bilge, feeling for the monkey wrench upon the thwart, "she might be in love with him, you know. Benny's got those soft brown eyes, and a smooth face with rosy cheeks. Benny's kind of like a girl himself, and he's the kind you'd think a girl might fall in love with."

"Nope!" dissented Ma, from heights of wisdom and experience represented by his twenty-seven years, most of which had been spent upon the plains of his native Texas. "Nope! When a gal falls in love she don't pick her own sort. She's more'n likely to pin her buddin' affections to some red-headed, toggle-jointed mistake like you, Bilge."

"Or some moth-eaten old piece of human camouflage like you!" retorted Bilge a trifle heatedly.

"Women have fell in love with me," boasted Ma laconically, and though the straight lips sealed themselves tight the patient gray eyes were fixed on distance with a reminiscent light as suggesting that his mind went back in doting memory to conquests that

his heart had made in those happy days when the world was not at war and he was not boson's mate on a destroyer, with his placidity of temperament and benignity of expression earning for him the ridiculous feminine monaker of Ma.

"But no, Bilge, le's don't git to quarrelin' with one 'nother now," he resumed presently. "We ain't got time. Benny's just his mother's little boy, and when she give him to the Navy she's got a right to have him pertected from these here sirens that infests this port. I'm a-goin' ashore and talk to thi girl."

"You?"

"I'm a-goin' to reason with her. I'll say, 'Now look yere, little lady. This boy Benny's a nice boy. He's got a pa and a ma at home and they're comfortable. They got a hundred thousand dollars; that's enough for Benny to marry some nice little Brooklyn stenographer and be happy ever after. What you want to go buttin' in and spile it all for?'"

"For the hundred thousand dollars, you mutt!" derided Bilge. "No, that's not the way to talk to her. Tell her Benny is poor — that this stuff about him havin' a hundred thousand dollars is just plain American bull. Tell her Benny is no good. Say he's just naturally the slickest thing about calico since King Solomon drove the snakes out of Ireland. Tell her Benny's got a wife in Liverpool and two in Brest."

"Looka yere, Bilge!" — and Ma's eyes blazed with a light of reproach and reproof — "I won't do no such a thing! You're nothin' but just a plain low-down character assassin's what you are."

"Tell you, Ma," said Bilge, enthusiasm undashed by such rebuke, and growing more enamored of his own ideas every moment, "you go ashore and talk to her mother. I'll reason with the girl. Between us we'll protect Benny. If worst seems about to come to worst, we can kidnap him."

Ma deliberated.

"I ain't never done myse'f much good, so fur as I can remember, a-messin' in other folks' affairs," he reflected. "As for talkin' to her mother, I ain't got no idea of doin' such. You talk to her mother and I'll palaver with the girl."

Upon this point Ma remained entirely obdurate, and when the "Old Girl," as his shipmates lovingly called him, had finally and definitely set his foot down one might as well cease, desist and quit, thereby saving breath. It was while Bilge still contemplated in a baffled sort of way this unreasoning stubbornness of the boson's mate's resolution that Jimmie Jurgenson came breezing up from C. P. O. quarters below — in which, by the way, he did not belong — bursting with a choice piece of deep-water scandal.

"You know Benny?" he inquired breathlessly; also idiotically, since every man on the ship knew the little yeoman and knew him well and favorably.

"Know him?" The habitually phlegmatic Ma bored Jimmie through with a glance of censure. "What's distressin' you, Jimmie? Bark it out. Relieve yo'se'f, as it were!"

"He's goin' to be married to-night," whispered Jimmie excitedly.

"Married? Who tuh?" It was Bilge who put the question, with a deceptive carelessness in his tone.



"Minnie O'Mahony!" answered Jimmie.

To get the full tonal value of this very common name as it is pronounced in the Irish ports one puts the accent on the second syllable instead of the third, and makes this "a" sound exceeding short, as short for instance as the "a" in "mash," thus: O'-Mă'-ho-ny. So accentuated it falls from the native lips in a thrilling concatenation of consonants, with negligible nuances of vowelizing in between — "Minnie O'Mahony!" pronounced trippingly upon the tongue.

"So that's the girl," the eyes of Ma and Bilge said to each other.

"Sounds like a right Irish kind of name," observed Ma to Jimmie.

"Irish?" giggled the ship's chatterbox. "What'd you think she was — a Polak?"

"What kind of a girl?" inquired Bilge, now with a grave air.

"Some peacherino!" averred Jimmie, grinning extravagantly.

"How's her teeth?" Ma wanted to know.

That question was inevitable. The water does something to the teeth over here. In numbers of mouths on this coast teeth are only a tradition. They have begun to go almost before womanhood blooms. The stock retort of Jackie to twittings about his girl's teeth is "Perfect! Both of 'em!"

"Beautiful!" insisted Jimmie recklessly.

"Then they're false," deduced Bilge.

"They are," admitted Jimmie. "Benny gave 'em to her." And with a grimace he flitted on to peddle from end to end of the *Judson* the shocking news of Benny's impending nuptials.

108      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

"What do you know about that?" demanded Ma with a curl of his thin lip. "Givin' your sweetheart a set of teeth for a weddin' present!"

"She's probably old," decided Bilge. "Ma, we got to get busy. Curfew must not ring to-night for Little Benny Riley. Curfew absitively must not ring!"

"What must be did must be did quick," declared Ma with rocklike firmness of purpose, and hurried below to shift from dungarees to his natty sailor blues, and to apply a razor to his face. When he came on deck half an hour later Ma was quite an attractive-looking person.

"I'll go ashore and see the girl," he observed with rare self-satisfaction to Bilge, who was compelled by duty to stay aboard till four.

"Wait an hour, Ma, and I'll be with you," the machinist's mate pleaded coaxingly.

"I'll have it all fixed up in an hour," boasted Ma.

"You'll likely have it all messed up in an hour so's Benny will marry the girl, and you and me will have to marry her sisters or her aunts or grandmothers or something to square it, is about what you'll do," retorted Bilge in discouraged tones.

But Ma smiled confidently, and with his flat navy hat listed jauntily to port he joined the liberty party in the motor sailer and in due time was planted "on the beach," where certain misgivings promptly overtook the boson's mate. For one thing he was alone. Ma generally had Bilge with him for comfort and support. For another thing he was about to interview, upon a most delicate errand, a young lady personally unknown to him but of whose charms and wit he had heard extravagantly from one who should

have been the best informed person in the world upon the subject, namely, First-Class Yeoman Benjamin Riley. The mere interview, therefore, promised difficulties for Ma, who though endowed with all the native gallantry of the true Texan and with certain memories of certain conquests behind him, to which reference has already been made, was nevertheless a trifle gun-shy where the other sex was concerned.

To be able to exchange frothy persiflage with a barmaid and feel at ease during the process was about as far as Ma's social achievements had extended in this port. And speaking of barmaids, yonder was the New York Bar now, with, standing at the door invitingly, Phyllis Ryan, just the sweetest barmaid of them all — with rosy cheeks, with witching eyes and most alluring smile. There was, moreover, something attractive and restful about Phyllis' place. Phyllis' place! That was one big advantage the trade in tempestuous liquors here had over the same trade at home. At home it was "Joe's place" or "Nick's place." Here it could be "Phyllis' place"; and hers was such a nice, clean, quiet little nook, on a tiny square off the main current of the beach thoroughfare!

The bar was plain deal but scoured until it shone like grained mahogany, and there behind it would be Phyllis with her cheeks scrubbed until they shone like an Idaho apple, while round at the end of the bar was a sort of window seat with a table in front of it, and when trade was dull Phyllis used to serve Ma there and in neighborly curious fashion sit beside him and ask questions about America. And Ma had an idea that at such times he might have

put a comradely arm round Phyllis while he sipped his grape juice, only his maidenly diffidence had always kept him back from finding out.

Now, therefore, it was hardly strange that Ma should point first for the New York Bar and his favorite window seat.

"Miss Phyllis, do you-all know this here Minnie O'Mahony?" he inquired when the half-emptied glass before him seemed to betoken that the time had come for gossip and mayhap for confidence.

"I do that!" said Phyllis enthusiastically.

"Where's she live?" This question was calculatedly put with dulled eye and simulations of casual indifference.

"Up the hill halfway of the block, two turns in on the court and one door beyant Mrs. Connelly's tobacco shop," answered Phyllis with the habitual glibness of her sex and race.

"She's schemin' to marry Little Benny Riley," observed Ma tentatively.

"And there's never a sweeter girl in all Ireland; nor one that would make a better wife!"

The heartiness of this assurance was slightly disconcerting to Ma.

"Is that all the comfort you got to give me?" he asked reproachfully.

"Comfort, is it?" laughed Phyllis.

"She's got false teeth," accused Ma.

"'Tis a lie!" Phyllis was direct to a fault.

"Little Benny gave 'em to her."

"The good God gave them to her," affirmed Phyllis, crossing herself. "Sure, they're as sound as my own." And she exhibited to Ma at dazzling closeness of range a pair of teeth that were noto-

riously among the prettiest and most perfect survivors anywhere on the beach.

"You got me bluffed, Phyllis," said Ma, backing off. "I ain't even got the nerve to press them ruby lips of yours to mine."

Phyllis laughed and tossed her head gayly. These Yankee sailors were such jokers, all.

"Faith," she declared, "and if ever ye'd try it once 'twould be a holy box on the ear ye'd get that would still be ringin' when ye got home to America."

There was something in the firm tone of Phyllis' utterance and in the snap she gave her chin that caused Ma to congratulate himself that he never had tried it.

"Don't le's quarrel, Miss Phyllis," he pleaded. "I ain't got the heart for it. I come to you, Miss Phyllis, for advice. I'm a committee of one to keep this here schemin' Minnie O'Mahony from committin' matrimony upon the person of one helpless American sailorman, to wit, Little Benny Riley; and I need help!"

Phyllis threw back her head and laughed hilariously. "Mrs. O'Mahony!" she screamed. "Mrs. O'Mahony!"

Ma looked disturbed. It seemed as if the girl were bent on calling Mrs. O'Mahony down from her house halfway up the hill, two turns in on the court, and the door beyond Mrs. Connelly's tobacco shop. The sailorman was more disturbed to find that Mrs. O'Mahony kept the tiny victualer's shop next door—the other side of the room, in fact—for it had a common entrance with the New York Bar.

"Sure and what's devourin' ye now, Phyllis?" demanded an acrid female voice, and immediately a huge giantess of a woman, putty-nosed but fierce of eye, came shuffling up to the line of the bar and peering sidewise into the recess of the window seat insisted upon her first query: "What's devourin' ye now, I say?"

"This is Minnie's mother," explained Phyllis to Ma.

Never too brave where women were concerned, as has been already intimated, Ma watched with misgivings and alarm this Amazonian woman's features take on an added ungraciousness as she made out his figure beside Phyllis, and fain would the boson's mate have filtered out through the window if the window had been open.

"This young man is of the same mind with ye," chuckled Phyllis mischievously. "He wants your Minnie to refrain from marryin' his shipmate."

"Refrain, is it?" challenged the large woman. "Sure and it's mesilf will refrain her, I will that!" Mrs. O'Mahony set herself with arms akimbo and chin thrust out defiantly. "Take yerself aboard ship, young man," she rumbled on, making a noise like a steam pipe in distress, "and tell that young snip of a Riley that there's never come disgrace on the O'Mahonys since the days of Mahon that was king and foully murdered on his way to the house of Donovan, but venged by Brian Boru. The O'Mahonys may be poor but they're iver that proud —"

Ma's Texan spirit grew restless and resentful under the implications of this to him unnecessary flood of oratory.

"Disgrace!" broke in the sailor, reddening; "I don't allow as it's any dis —"

"No disgrace?" sneered Mrs. O'Mahony. "Wid him teasin' and walkin' out wid her every blessed night his ship is in port? And buyin' her presents and the like? Ye should see the presents he give her — the shoes, and the stockin's, and the gloves, and the ribbons and lawnjeree — real Carrick-macross and Limerick lace, till it's fair a scandal. The neighbors are that scandilized —"

"Pardon me, ma'am," persisted Ma; "but I ain't seen yet where it's a disgrace to give presents to a lady. Back in my country you can give her a calf or a cotton crop if you want to, and it ain't no disgrace if you want to give it and she wants to take it."

"But he belongs to the navee!" she snorted.

"In my country that ain't figured to be nothin' disreputable," said Ma quickly, and now a little stiffly.

"He's a common American sailor!"

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Ma, now all dignity and standing very straight. "No man ain't common when he gits that uniform on. He just naturally cain't be."

This new manner of Ma's held Mrs. O'Mahony for a moment, and she seemed less satisfied with herself. "He's that slick," she began with a fresh breath and a new air as if feeling that now she got on firmer ground — "he's that slick at gettin' round her that he's won her silly heart into yearnin' to marry him."

"That ain't no crime neither, the way we figure it," persisted Ma, all his stubbornness roused and his eyes biazing indignantly. "Why, shucks,

woman! Your daughter couldn't git a better husband than Little Benny Riley."

"The deceitful, snoopin', snippin' gossoon!" raged Mrs. O'Mahony.

"You-all sure are a-slanderin' a mighty nice boy," declared Ma with frowning displeasure. "However, that's what I come to talk to you about. I cain't stand by and see his fine young character assassinated, but they ain't really no use arguin'. You-all musn't let your daughter marry this yere young man. He's got a father and a mother and they're comfortable. You can see how they'd feel with him marryin' a — a —"

Ma was conscientiously feeling for the diplomatic word, while a new expression was coming over the face of Mrs. O'Mahony.

"The O'Mahonys are as good as the Rileys any day!" she flung into the breach.

"'Course they are, Mis' O'Mahony!" Ma hastened suavely to aver. "'Course they are! Ever' bit! But you see, you parents not to win' each other, and these two young people kind of thoughtlesslike — why — so we-all just talked it over, me and some of the boys, and we 'lowed we'd come over and ask you not to let 'em."

Mrs. O'Mahony's countenance had changed again. Over the pallor of surprise rage had mounted once more — a mightier rage, and one that revealed the blackness of its venom in the gnashing of the two or three of the lady's surviving front teeth. Mrs. O'Mahony could hardly be said now to speak. She became a volcano and erupted streams of molten language.

"Of-all-the-interferin', insultin' character-de-



stroyin' impydenche-that-ever-I-heard-in-all-the-days-of-me-life! . . ."

She wound her passion higher with the utterance of every word.

"Calm yo'se'f, ma'am," urged Ma. "You-all are a-goin' to blow up a condenser or somethin' and injure yo'se'f permanent. There ain't nobody a-goin' to do you no harm. I just come along over here this afternoon peaceablelike to prevent a friend of mine from doin' harm to hisself."

But Mrs. O'Mahony had passed the possibility of calming. Words too had lost the power of relieving her; yet she resented supremely this final maternal air of Ma, so to speak, and her excited eye falling upon the sticky bar mop she seized it and started toward the sailorman as with intent to do him bodily harm or extravagant personal indignity. Perceiving this intent Ma debated momentarily whether it were more honorable to do battle with a woman or to fly ingloriously from her assaults.

He decided upon the latter and moved with strategical deliberation till he had enticed the threatening person of Mrs. O'Mahony past the table, when he neatly dodged round the other end, avoided the clattering figure of Phyllis, who was quite convulsed with mirth, leaped nimbly over the bar and escaped into the little square in front, whence he heard Mrs. O'Mahony's futile ragings and Phyllis' squawks of joyous laughter both pursuing him. Each was alike offensive to the proud spirit of Ma, who glanced about quickly to make sure that no derisive sailor eye had marked his hasty and undignified exit from the New York Bar. No bluejackets being visible, the young man, deaf to the shouted pleadings of

Phyllis to return, luffed and weathered the corner and paused to collect himself and excogitate upon the situation.

"The old lady zigzags some in her mind, but she shore is dead agin Minnie leadin' little Benny to the halter," was his first deduction. "She ain't heard nothin' at all about this here weddin' bein' set for to-night though, an' that leaves the whole thing up to me," was his second.

Ma sighed. His feelings were somewhat ruffled, his pride hurt, his dignity assailed. It was, all things considered, an unpleasant business upon which he had engaged himself. Still Ma was not easily dissuaded from his purposes. He had undertaken a mission on behalf of his friend, and he would carry on though the end be bitter.

"That there Bilge person will be on the beach directly!" he reflected by way of spurring himself along. "I got to get busy or he'll be in here and have the whole thing jazzed up. I shore would love to be round though when he has his talk with the old lady. Maybe I can git back and git hid behind Phyllis' bar in time."

Nourished by this comfortable hope Ma hurried up the hill. He found following Phyllis' directions impossible, as such directions so readily given by the loquacious folk of this tight little isle always are impossible; but by repeated inquiries he got himself directed at last to the O'Mahony door, which appeared to be but one entrance of many to a hivelike heap of stone and plaster that bulked its ugly shape on the hillside and probably sheltered one way and another half a dozen families and mayhap some of their enterprises as well.

The sailor knew the type well enough — rookeries of most unexpected relation and attachment, with halls connected that had not been meant to be connected, with passages closed up or whole rooms or series of rooms blocked off and unused, given over to bats and spiders because of some old superstition as to haunt or ill luck; while at the same time doors might have been chiseled through stone walls to afford access to other houses or areaways or to add other apartments like architectural warts and wens to the main structure — a form of house admirably adapted to the needs of people who wish to live complex evasive lives, but to the simple honest folk who did inhabit them a mere thriftless accommodation to the most rudimentary needs of civilized life.

Because Ma did know the type, he approached this particular entrance to the pile with no particular hope that he was entering the immediate purlieus of the O'Mahony home. One glance convinced him that he had been mistaken in this, however, and he stood with sinking heart and utter loss of self-confidence before the picture it afforded. There were animate things in this picture, and inanimate. Since the inanimate furnished the necessary setting for the animate they had best be apprehended first.

The door itself, after a fashion of Irish doors, was cut in half at the waistline. The lower half was closed, but the upper half swung hospitably inward, inviting to a view of the interior — an interior that was cluttered up with furniture of various vintages and many kinds suggesting that the single room was used for the entire daily round of at least one family's life. There was a bed with posts of wood that age and the incidents of domestic

usage had rendered varnishless, and in reach of this was a kitchen table that obviously served also as a dining table. Age, too, had had its way with the thick deal top of this table, for it was worn into waves by the rubbing of generations of elbows and of sliding dishes, while at the corners it was hacked into gutters by the careless but emphatic descent of thousands of blades of knives as they sawed the ends from loaves or pared the cheese or sliced the ham.

Other furniture in the room was of a like degree of antiquity; the dressing shelf was ancient, all save its mirror; the chests of drawers were time-scarred. The visitor was assured, however, that he was still in his own world by the presence of certain anachronisms and incongruities. A stove, quite modern and quite rusty, was set in a very venerable fireplace, which had been in part bricked up in consequence; and there was a modern lamp on the archaic mantel, while a luridly lithographed calendar and a brilliant poster of the Cork horse fair were in evidence as savoring particularly of the now, so that the humble ambassador from the great new republic was not abashed by all this antiquity, but merely reminded how venerable was this stone-pile scramble of human habitation into which fraternal duty led him.

Yet the bald truth is that all of this inanimate got no more than a passing glance from Ma. With the tail of an eye he swept it up into the background of consciousness and forgot it, standing transfixed by the animate — a very modern-looking Irish girl in a decrepit old upholstered chair, knitting merrily while a kitten lifted a playful paw toward her yarn. She was a plump little thing — the girl — who bent

over her work with an air of happy industry. Her skirts were short, her shoes were low, her stockings were smooth and shiny silk — a gift from Benny, no doubt — and her hair was braided and coiled at the back in a fashion that Ma decided instantly was the only becoming way for a girl to do her hair.

The significance of the picture crept cunningly round the impressionable heart of Ma — the kitten, the happy-faced girl, the tune she was humming — Over There — and the sweater in navy gray!

“A sweater for Benny, by gum!” admitted Ma, with delight and pain mingling in his bosom.

But it was when he knocked that Ma's loyalty to his purpose in the coming interview was first actually threatened, for the knitter looked up at him with a most destructive smile. The girl's features were not exactly regular; her forehead was low, her nose turned up perceptibly, and her mouth was possibly a little large; yet she smiled on Ma wholesomely, winsomely, and with a light of fine good feeling in her eyes as she recognized the uniform of the Navy and seemed to approve it as her own. It occasioned Ma a stabbing sense of guilt and remorse to think that he had conspired so recklessly against the peace and happiness of eyes like these, lips like these.

The girl rose and came quickly to the door. The sailor's face was unfamiliar to her but he was a sailor; he came to ask a question, perhaps to seek direction.

“I am from the *Judson*,” said Ma, doffing his flat hat quickly.

Minnie's face lighted freshly with such an expression of faith and camaraderie as indicated that all men from the *Judson* were cousins to her heart.

120      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

"You come from Benny?" she asked with doting emphasis on the proper name, a sort of freighting of it with the sweetness of honey and the tenderness of great love.

"Yessum," said Ma; "that is, not exactly. Ford's my name. You see Benny's an awful good friend of mine and we —"

For a moment a puzzled network wrinkled the girl's brow.

"Ford? Ford?" she murmured, trying to be polite but frankly wondering. "I don't seem to remember. Bilge and Ma are the ones he talks most about."

"I'm Ma," confessed her visitor with an embarrassed blush, as if feeling that his absurd feminine nickname had placed him at a disadvantage by thus preceding him into this most appealing child-woman's presence.

"O-o-o-oh!" exclaimed the girl, and welcomed him with both hands, strong little hands and yet tender, so that the very touch of them contributed at once to the further breaking down of the osseous structure of Ma's resolution.

"And we sort of heard out on the ship," began Ma, but was checked by Minnie, who, blushing prettily, placed a finger on her lips and shook her blond head at him in warning that he must not babble secrets where even the walls have ears.

"But tell me about Benny! Isn't Benny that wonderful?" she demanded, with features perfectly radiant.

"He shore is!" deposed Ma fervently, though his mind scattered wildly as he marveled how ever he could break to this confiding little creature —

"Tell me about him! What kind of a man is he on shipboard?"

"He's jest about the nicest boy on that ship," affirmed Ma, cracking his finger joints in embarrassment while his eyes skirted the room and then ventured back to the face before him.

"And does the captain like him?" she asked anxiously.

"You can take it that he does, Miss Minnie. If the captain didn't like him Benny wouldn't be a yeoman at all; he'd be just a plain deckwasher or something."

"Oh, and do the boys like him?"

"They jest about say their prayers to 'im," declared Ma, gulping at the largest figure of speech his mind could muster. "There ain't a more popular man on the ship, less'n it's Bilge, and Bilge is so ugly and unfavored by Nature that every human bein' that sees him just naturally his heart goes out to him in pure sympathy."

"Oh, I'm that glad!" gurgled Minnie, jumping up and down. "That's what they all say."

"You been asking 'em, I suppose," smiled Ma.

"'Deed and I do," admitted Minnie with that sunny smile which, together with the soft Irish burr of her voice, was melting the heart of Ma as if it were a thing of wax.

For a minute the needles played hide and seek with the stubby white fingers, while the sweater grew by a row of stitches and the sailor boy could find no word for his palsied tongue.

"We're not going to live with mother when we're married," confided the girl with a touch of sadness.

"No?" asked Ma, with intonations of concern.

122      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

"Mother isn't nice to Benny," explained Minnie.

"Not nice to him?" inquired Ma, pretending to be amazed. "Nobody can help bein' nice to Benny."

"Mother can that," declared Minnie with a sober nod and an emphasis that was very significant. "She can help being nice to anybody that she doesn't like."

"And ain't got no particular use for American sailors, huh?"

"Sure and she has," affirmed Minnie with a change of tone and a toss of her little head while her fingers played rapidly with the knitting needles. "Sure and she does; only she wants me to marry Farmer Cadogan's Patsy, that's got seventeen cows and a meadow. But I love Benny."

"Benny! Why, Benny's got a hundred thousand dollars!" exclaimed Ma, startled to recall the fact. "Do you know how much a hundred thousand dollars is? Why, for that you-all can buy a ranch and a whole herd of white-faces down where I come from."

Minnie did not start.

She knitted on in a silence for as much as two stitches and a half, or maybe three, and then she turned blue perturbed eyes on Ma, with a sudden pallor coming to her cheeks.

"Benny never told me that," she admitted with a little gasp of fright.

"He told me oncet," affirmed Ma; "and what Benny tells me is the truth, by gum! But — What you scared of?"

The knitting lay in a little heap in Minnie's lap and her breath was coming quickly.

"A man with twenty thousand pounds doesn't



marry a girl with — with nothing — over here. His folks — his solicitors wouldn't allow him."

Minnie's paleness grew; for a moment it seemed as if her heart had almost stopped beating, and her hand was pressed sharply to her bosom.

"Do you think," she whispered haltingly, "that he didn't mean it?"

"Who? Benny?"

"When he said that he would marry me — to-night?"

"Mean it?" echoed Ma, his heart filling like a balloon in his breast. "He meant it with every bit of man that's in him!"

Now, as Bilge had put it once, "there is something about Ma that when he says a thing and wants you to believe it you just can't help doing it." Perhaps that is one reason why they call him Ma.

"Oh, I am that glad!" said the little woman with a relieved sigh. But she was still in a doubtful mood. "What for was it, do you think, that Benny didn't tell me that he was rich?" she asked after an interval.

"I reckon he just wanted to make sure you-all wasn't marryin' him for the money," suggested Ma.

"For his money?" echoed the modest little voice. "Benny knew I wouldn't do that. I just love Benny! Perhaps it was on account of his father and mother. I fancy he thought if I knew they were rich I'd make sure they wouldn't like me, and then I wouldn't marry him. Oh, I did hope — do you think, Mr. — Mr. Ford —"

The little lady stood up suddenly and confronted Ma with her hands behind her back, the trim figure

erect — trim but inclined to plumpness — and asked straightforwardly, with the blue eyes searching, with the wistful lips yearning: “Do you think that Benny’s father and mother will like me?”

“Honey, they shore would love you!” affirmed Ma gallantly, with a wide two-armed gesture of the plains. “Nobody on earth could help likin’ you at the first look. I’m plumb in love with you myself, and if Benny don’t marry you — why, my flat hat and my old flat head is in the ring right now.”

Minnie laughed heartily, entirely reassured.

“But look here,” inquired the sailor, “how do you figure to pull off this stunt of gettin’ married to-night, with your ma agin you like she is?”

“Why, we have the —”

Minnie began to explain confidentially, and then checked herself, gazing at Ma inquisitively, as demanding why if he was such a warm friend of Benny’s he did not know their plans. That look finished Ma.

“Miss Minnie,” he blurted frankly. “I tell you the honest old Jerusalem gospel truth: Benny didn’t take me into his confidence none at all about these here obsequies of his. He knew that Bilge and me was against ’em on principle. I just heard that he was a-goin’ to commit matrimony to-night, and I come over here to persuade you not to do it. I’ve fell for you flatter’n ever Benny did, and I just want to tell you that they might be some scheme or other pulled off by a bunch of mush-brained gobs to keep Benny from keepin’ his appointment with you to-night, and maybe it would be to yore advantage to sort of pass me out the details.”

“Oh!” gasped Minnie. “They couldn’t be so

cruel, because — " And her little chin got a pucker in it that was most distressing to behold.

" They could be just that big darned fools," insisted Ma. " Look at me! "

And by a gesture and an expression of self-scorn he indicated his presence there and the errand upon which he had come.

Minnie was a discerning person. She neither argued nor reproached, but at once began to explain.

" Benny has the second dog to-night. That lets him off at eight. He'll be here at nine. Mother comes up for tea at five, then goes back to the store and stays till about ten. Father Brown is going to marry us at nine-thirty."

" Where? "

" At the cathedral; and then come home and break the news to mother."

" And how did you come it over Father Brown with your ma — "

" Father Brown likes Benny. He'd do anything for him."

" Which shows that Father Brown ain't no bad judge of humanity," commented Ma; " but he must be a brave man, knowin' your mother like he prob'ly does."

" Mother? " Minnie laughed musically. " Mother will wilt when Father Brown tells her it's he that's done it, and all for the best. 'Tis not against the likes of him that she'd be holding out at all, at all."

Ma weighed this estimate of the probabilities gravely and seemed to be fairly well satisfied with its correctness.

" And so, Miss Minnie," he inquired, " all 'at you want done to insure yore perpetual happiness

from this time on and forever is for one First-class Yeoman, Little Benny Riley by name, to be delivered to these here premises right side up with care, on or before nine o'clock to-night?"

Minnie blushed and nodded.

"Traitor that I am, I will see that he is yere or my name ain't Ford and Texas ain't the greatest state in the whole plumb world," declared Ma.

Minnie crooked a playful finger at Ford and wrinkled up her nose amiably.

"You can be the first to kiss the bride," she smiled.

"I'd a heap sight ruther kiss her now," he plucked up courage to say.

"It can't be did," laughed Minnie, proudly displaying her acquisition of a fleeting and unlovely American idiom.

"I reckon not," sighed Ma ruefully.

Minnie glanced at the clock, and guided as by a premonition stepped to the door and looked down the street.

"Mother is coming!" she exclaimed quickly. "You must go."

Ma paled at the news and hastily gathered his flat hat unto him. The prospect of meeting Mrs. O'Mahony face to face when he had just agreed openly to compound treason against his own intents of half an hour ago, as well as to conspire against Bilge and the will of this irascible Irish matron, was by no means inviting.

"No! Not that way!" commanded Minnie as Ma started for the door. "Mother might suspect something. Here!" The girl caught hold of the sailor's arm and spun him round with a surprising

display of youthful strength. "Go up the stairs there. Take the door you see at the turn. Go through it to a passage that leads out, take two turns to the right and one to the left, and you come out on the alley."

There it was, the typical Irish direction, "two turns to the right and one to the left," and so on, perfectly simple in sound and perfectly bewildering in fact. Yet Ma, though suspecting that he was about to plunge into labyrinthine entanglements of attics strange and passages tortuous and mystifying, that would lead him anywhere but where he wished to go, plunged upward recklessly, for there was an urgency in Minnie's tones which he had not the strength to deny. The young man found himself almost immediately in a room that evidently constituted the sleeping apartment of a female. At any rate there was a bed in it; and an array of feminine garments hanging along the wall, with a sort of dressing table at one side surmounted by a mirror. His very presence in such an apartment tended to excitement and confusion, so that Ma hurried to a door that he discerned, half concealed beneath the garments on the walls, a door with the knob unconnected with the lock and planted midway of the central panel, as Irish knobs are wont to be planted.

Through this door Ma undertook to make a hasty and noiseless exit as he heard heavy steps on the flagged floor below and the vibrant voice of Mrs. O'Mahony greeting her daughter, at first with undoubted affection in its tones and then complaining querulously that the teakettle was not yet put to boil.

The door opened very stiffly. It took all of Ma's strength to budge it, in fact, and when it yielded a scraping sound issued from behind as if something heavy within were stowed against it.

"Faith and did ye hear anything upstairs?" inquired the mother's penetrating voice.

"No, mother," Minnie answered blandly after an interval of silence.

"'Tis myself has the better ears then," alleged a self-satisfied tone; "or McCarthy's ghost is walkin' in broad daylight and not on a Chuesday."

Succeeding this a heavy foot was planted on the stair.

Ma thrusting in a hasty hand through the crack in the door identified a chest of some sort as blocking his advance, and hesitated, darting an anxious glance back round the wall of the room behind him, to discern if perhaps there was another door that he had overlooked. Yes, there it was, on the opposite side of the room, plainly visible now, though from where he had stood before shadows had concealed it.

"Wait a minute, mother; I want to show you this," called the voice of Minnie, with a note of trepidation in it that escaped the mother or was misinterpreted by her; but the sailor understood it very well. It was a device to delay Mrs. O'Mahony and enable him to get clear and away.

But Mrs. O'Mahony would not thus be detained. Her feet pounded upward. There was no time therefore for Ma to venture crossing the room to see if the other door opened easier — no time to pause and count on his fingers or toes whether this was the right turn or not he had taken. There was time only to lift the heavy chest noiselessly a little aside

from the door, to slip quickly through the narrow opening thus permitted and stand breathless and thanking his lucky star that Mrs. O'Mahony, toiling upward, would find nothing in sight to confirm her well-grounded suspicions.

Ma remained motionless till the stairs assured him that a heavy body had creaked downward again, meanwhile taking stock of the room in which he found himself. It appeared to be a sort of limbo of discarded souls of things no longer useful. The window had not been washed in generations, and the dim light that struggled through the dust-enameled panes was barely sufficient to reveal the shapes of old chests, cupboards and stacks of broken or dismantled furniture. Through this after a time Ma began to pick his way, slowly and noiselessly, for fear still of rousing that alert and acrid personality behind and below him.

And as he moved he speculated, at first in mere curiosity, at the strange shapes with which the room was filled, and then with something like method and intent as he discerned opposite him a door leading outward. Eventually he reached this door, stealing forward in ghostly fashion, but did not at once lay violent hands upon it from consideration of what might lie behind. Convinced now that he had taken the wrong way out of Mrs. O'Mahony's bedroom, Ma realized that he was scouting in foreign territory and applied a cautious eye where a time-eroded notch in the door afforded a comprehensive view of what lay immediately beyond. This at first appeared as no more than another bedroom, scantily yet peculiarly furnished, since amid a few dilapidated bits that looked as if they might have been

## 130 : The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

recovered from the room in which he stood to make his survey, there were some things of a decidedly twentieth-century appearance.

Among these latter was a boxed affair that to Ma resembled nothing so much as the dictaphone he had seen on the stage in one scene of *The Argyle Case*. There was also a pair of exceedingly modern binoculars on a table, which, itself ancient enough, held an array of new-looking bottles of inks and a rack of test-tubes containing chemicals in fluid form.

"What the tarnation kind of a layout is this?" inquired Ma beneath his breath. When no answer vouchsafed itself to this query his eye addressed its keen inquiring glance to the door that stood beyond the table. Through that, Ma judged, guessing recklessly at the architecture of the house, was the passageway that he required to make his exit to the street in safety.

But again there rose a question: Did this passageway, if passageway there were, conduct to a stair that led downward into the middle of somebody's living room, or did it lead outside to a street? If the latter, well; but if it led down inside, ill; for what was a man in a sailor's uniform going to have to offer by way of explanation in case he descended suddenly into the midst of some family at their tea? Ma reddened at the prospect of such embarrassment. He was deciding, however, that he would at least go across and try this door, when abruptly a key grated in the lock.

Locked! That was strange. This was somebody's outside door, then; and how did anybody get to that door so quietly? Ma should have heard the



advancing footsteps booming in the passage. Since he did not he was scarcely surprised that the door was now opened very stealthily by a tall, roughly bewhiskered creature with weasel eyes and furtive manner, wearing the dress of a laborer and the superficial appearance of a shepherd or drover. His shoes and clothing were dust-covered, as if from tramping in the streets or upon country roads.

The newcomer's first act was suspicious. It was to survey swiftly every detail of the room, as making sure that nothing in it had been disturbed; and his second was to remove with care, as if to avoid disturbing any of the dust that adhered, his hat, his coat, his shoes and his trousers; after which he washed his hands and face, redressed himself in gentler garb, and appeared to proceed very directly to business by taking up the binoculars from the desk and beginning to sweep the harbor.

It seemed to Ma that he was studying particularly the anchorages of the destroyers. Occasionally he lowered the glasses and made notes with a pencil. Ma suspected that he was noting down the identification numbers of the ships, which his glasses of course would plainly make out, and the blood began to surge hot in the young sailor's veins. Next the man took up the earpiece of the dictaphone and listened interminably. Sometimes as he listened he smiled. At others his unappealing features assumed a bored expression. Eventually he put down the dictaphone and began to write, laboriously, painstakingly.

"If that feller's writin' to his girl he's shore tellin' it to her right," Ma remarked to himself impatiently.

Just then the writer leaned back with a sigh of

## 132      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

satisfaction as at the conclusion of a task and lifted the page before him, when to Ma's surprise he saw that the writing upon it was slowly fading out. The top of the page was already blank; the characters were vanishing line by line, and only the last few remained freshly purple, and those were paling before the sailor's astonished eye.

"This yere whole thing is phony," decided Ma gravely when his watch upon the entire series of operations had consumed nearly an hour. "I'm a-goin' to jiu-jitsu this feller and sort of look him over."

Silently he untied and removed his shoes and then peered out again. The man was sweeping his letter through the air and fanning it till it should be dry, and presently he held it still again, a page of pristine whiteness. Succeeding this he began immediately to write upon it once more; but this time with ordinary-looking black ink instead of the brilliant purple he had employed before.

"That's the fake letter the censor reads," decided Ma, and communed with himself silently as follows: "And now for them little lessons in jiu-jitsu that Professor Smith give us all at B. N. Y. last winter" — B. N. Y. being sailorese for Brooklyn Navy Yard. "Lemme see; you stiffen the right hand, thus, and you chop the edge of it in sharp in the general vicinity of the Adam's apple, thus; and if you have done it right the victim immediately becomes unconscious without uttering a single sound. Yeh — that's the dope. Just like the prof. give it to us."

Ma pulled the door to him softly and swiftly, and with two long catlike strides was behind the

man at the table with his right hand upraised, sharp, stiff and bladelike.

"Excuse me, stranger," began Ma, and the tall man turned in startled surprise, lowering his shoulder as if to open the way for the impending blow at his throat by the very act of reaching swiftly toward his hip. The hard hand of the boson's mate described its sharp and merciless arc, and the tall figure gasped and sank listless in the chair.

"Durned if it didn't work!" exclaimed Ma pleasantly. "Smith, you are all right. I always said you was all right too. I knowed if ever I got the chance — There now! That'll do you fur a spell."

This last was addressed to the silent figure now upon the floor, for Ma had swiftly undone his black sailor neckerchief, made a huge knot in the center of it, and wadding the victim's own handkerchief into his mouth had gagged him securely with two passes about his neck and through the open jaws.

"Now for a piece of rope!"

No rope was handy, however, but a coil of the flexible dictaphone wire lay upon the table, and with loops from this Ma bound the tall man's feet and hands, kicked him rather carelessly out of the way and began a close examination of the table. At first it appeared to contain no drawers, but Ma's investigation was thorough, and presently he had brought to light a flat receptacle in the very top board of the table itself, containing letters written in that peculiar purple, which some treatment or application had now rendered fixed and stable. These purple characters were in German, and they were written over with black ink in English sen-

134      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

tences that dealt with commonplaces, obviously designed to pass a censor.

"I got yuh, stranger," said Ma, looking downward and kicking at the hulk beneath him vigorously but not very effectively, because Ma was still in his stocking feet. "I got yuh. Yo're a spy all right, damn yuh!"

Ma next decided that it would be as well to don his shoes.

"Now we'll see what this thing has got to say," he remarked, enjoying the situation extravagantly as he picked up the dictaphone and began to listen. At first no sound came through at all, and then what did come was so astonishing that Ma nearly fell off the chair.

"Well, whaddaya know about that?" he gasped, and took the receiver from his ear to gaze at it for an incredulous moment, after which he listened again.

"We just naturally got to save Benny from himself," the voice was saying.

"Still chewin' over that idea!" muttered Ma, a twinkle coming into his eye.

"It seems like a low-down trick to do," argued another voice on the wire, a voice that Ma instantly recognized as belonging to Dyckman.

"It's the only way to save him," said Bilge solemnly. "Old Ma was a-goin' to help me, but — but I think he's gone over to the enemy."

Ma reddened slightly.

"He was seen going into Mrs. O'Mahony's house more'n an hour ago, and I went there to ask for him — and Gee! the old woman chased me out. Flung a kettle of boiling tea at me, to be exact.

Now here, Dyckman, is the dope: It's all set for the wedding to come off about nine to-night, and we got to kidnap Benny."

"Say you, Bilge! Say!"

Ma tried frantically to break in on the conversation, but presently it was borne in upon him that this was only a one-way wire.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed futilely, and went on listening.

"But what's to hinder him marryin' the next time we're in?" argued Dyckman.

"Because there won't be no next time for Benny. He's on the list that's goin' home with this nucleus crew for a new destroyer to-morrow. That's why they're hurryin' up with this marryin' business. It's to-night or never for that schemin' little minx that's got Benny snared."

"Well then, I'll help you," said Dyckman reluctantly. "But I ain't very strong for the job. Benny! Why, darn it, Benny's about the best friend I got on the ship. Benny lends me money."

"Same here!" affirmed Bilge conscientiously. "That's why we're doing it for him. This is just a friendly act of self-sacrifice on our part."

"Not that Benny's a-going to look at it that way at all, in my opinion," vouchsafed Dyckman.

"However, what's the scheme?"

"Simple enough. Benny's got the second dog. He's cleaning up some of the cap'tain's papers for him and he's got to stay till he gets through. He might get off a little before eight, and he might not get off till a little after; but we lay for him when he comes to the dock, meet him casual-like, start up the hill with him, and there at the turn be-

yond Mrs. O'Callaghan's store is one of these Irish blind alleys. At the end of the alley is a donkey stable, and over the stable is a loft full of straw."

"And I suppose I might be excused for wondering how you know that?" said Dyckman. "S'pose you laid up there some night when you got seasick from watching so many schooners crossing the bar, hey?"

The listening Ma smiled at this, though he knew its intimation was base and improbable. Bilge, however, chose to overlook it as a bit of harmless persiflage, and went forward with:

"We can toll him into the donkey shed most likely with some excuse or other; we might even toll him up into the hay if we're any good on imagination — some yarn about Ma bein' sick up there or something. Anyhow, the minute he stops tollin' we grab him, tie him up and take him up there and keep him nice and quiet till just time to make the seven-thirty boat in the morning. Benny's reasonable. He won't make much fuss when he finds we simply ain't a-goin' to let him commit matrimonial suicide. He'll even take it philosophic."

"All right," said Dyckman, evidently won to the idea. "Meet you here at seven bells."

"Seven bells is right," responded the satisfied tones of Bilge; and the conversation ended.

"Why," remarked Ma within himself. "I know that donkey house. It ain't so far from here. It's in the middle of this block somewhere, and this house rams back into the middle of the block. Blast me if I don't allow 'at that's just about the donkey house right out the window there. Seems to me I can smell it. Ain't that a-goin' to be tough, though?"

Benny tied up right through the wall from where he's supposed to be married. Ain't it?" And Ma smiled ironically. "S'posin' now there was a way through to the donkey house from here, and there was a trapdoor in the roof or something, which o' course there ain't; but supposin' there was!"

And then as if halted by the futility of such speculation Ma's mind turned to a more pressing question.

"But say! Where's the other end of this wire?" he demanded aloud, and taking off the earpiece stared at it inquisitively. "In the back room of O'Connor's pub, huh? That's the only place where Bilge and Dyckman would both meet up at this time of day. Good place for a dictaphone, too; for there's more enlisted men's private chit-chat in that back room than any place else on the beach."

Looking down Ma noticed that his captive had regained consciousness, as revealed by the beady twinkle of the eyes.

"In O'Connor's, huh?" he demanded, holding the earpiece to the sight of the man on the floor and kicking his long flanks inquiringly.

The man was stubborn at first and would not answer. Ma in consequence stirred him up more earnestly, whereat he grunted painfully and appeared to nod assent.

"'Lowed it," said Ma. "'Lowed it when my apple cyart first driv up!"

And he settled himself comfortably for another prolonged spell of listening, during which he gained an astounding conception of the amount of information that may be gathered if an alien ear were only cocked to hear the chance remarks of twenty men

138      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

in the course of an hour as they sat for a few minutes in changing groups in the somewhat private alcove at the rear of Jerry O'Connor's bar and contributed each his choice bits of latest news to the sum of general knowledge.

Ma learned, for instance, by piecing these bits of news together, that the U.S.S. *Gallagher* had that day been in contact with an enemy submarine, that she had dropped depth charges on him and crippled him so that he was able to make way only on the surface, but that there in open battle the German had planted a chance shell in the engine room of the *Gallagher*, crippling her speed to fourteen knots, after which the Hun mechanic worked frantically upon his damaged valves so that ultimately and before the assistance the *Gallagher's* radio had summoned could arrive the enemy was able to submerge successfully.

"That shore is tough luck!" growled Ma, and then paused to reflect and marvel.

Nobody ashore knew this story; no sailor not upon the *Gallagher* herself, which was still at sea, knew it in its entirety; yet the gossip of enlisted men, each with his little piece of news that had somehow come leaking from the radio rooms of different ships, helped to piece out the narrative, which, however it might err in details and slop over in exaggerations, doubtless approximated the general truth; and though the facts could be of no definite aid to the enemy, who of course had its own source of information, it nevertheless pointed the way to danger.

"Why, why," reflected Ma, "what this guy, a-settin' here all day long, piecin' together the talk in



Jerry O'Connor's barroom — what he don't know about what the old flotilla's doin' there don't nobody need 'er tell him at all. All he requires is a scheme for gettin' the old dope out; and I reckon he's got that." Ma turned again to a contemplation of the array of bottles of ink and chemicals. "A window that looks out on the harbor, a glass that picks out the number of every ship that goes out, and a dictaphone that hears all the gossip of the flotilla — say, purty slick, what! And I got the bird right under my feet! But here, you yellow dog!" — and Ma was addressing the man on the floor — "you-all couldn't do this by yo'se'f. You must 'a' had a partner to set here listenin' when —"

The sailor did not finish the sentence; the receiver of the dictaphone dropped with a clatter and Ma's head fell forward under the impact of a crushing blow from behind, while crimson drops sprayed the sheet of blotting paper on the old table. The third figure in the room stooped at once and began cutting the gag from the mouth of the prostrate spy and unbinding his hands and feet. The prostrate one rose with ugly wrath in his small wicked eye and kicked vengefully in his turn at the limp figure in the chair. When it collapsed and sank like a sack of sand to the floor the kicking was continued maliciously. It was this kicking that Ma felt first. He knew that his ribs were being dented and splintered by something, but he knew no more, for unconsciousness came again, and he did not hear the debate that went on over his senseless body.

"Let go! He's gone!" growled the second spy, who as to appearance was as roughly got up as the other, and who, sneaking soft-footed to the door

according to his habit, had discerned the situation and dealt the too venturesome Ma a killing blow with the butt of his revolver. "You only make him bleed, and that's difficult to get rid of. He's dead," he announced, after feeling hastily for his pulse.

"What'll we do with him? Damn Yankee snoop!" inquired the first spy.

"At midnight, or before, even, it will be easy enough to slip him out and drop him in the bay."

The tall man looked at the limp thing on the floor and shuddered. "God!" he said. "I don't want it round here till midnight. I have work to do."

"Then we'll pitch it outside till it's safe to move it the rest of the way," proposed the other cheerfully. Together they took "it" up.

But old Ma Ford, old only to the extent of his twenty-seven vigorous years, toughened by a long youth in the great outdoors of Texas, hardened by two years as brakeman on a railroad, seasoned by one whole enlistment on that rummy old prune barge, the cruiser *San Diego*, and now hardened again, case-hardened, perhaps, by a long winter on a United States destroyer, where in these combing British seas a man fought each day for the mere privilege of keeping on board and doing his daily duty — Ma was in no danger of becoming an "it" from a mere smash on the back of his head and sundry mulelike tramlings of his ribs. Ma, as they picked him up, was faintly conscious.

"Didn't bleed much," said the tall man.

"Lucky! That's because I killed him so dead," explained the other blithely.

"Serves him right; damned Yankee pig!"

But these voices registered as no more than con-

fused and distant murmurings on Ma's disturbed mental apparatus. Nor had he any definite idea how far they bore his sagging body, though it seemed that they carried him far and through tortuous winding channels, since every sway and twist was an exquisite bit of agony to his pommeled ribs and bashed and aching head. At length, after some eternities, they dropped him on a pile of rocks, and he lay wondering for ages and ages, with a thing like a chariot race going on in the back of his mind.

His mental state was dreamlike and unsatisfactory. His mind was full of a great regret — regret that he had let the spy get away from him, two spies in fact, for there must have been two, since two men were surely carrying him, and it must have been that the second of them had struck him down from behind. But bigger far was the regret about Benny and his wedding. The blue eyes of Minnie, and the too large but wistful and wonderfully appealing mouth, came up before him like a dream, pleadingly.

"It shore is a shame, honey! It shore is a shame!" he found himself trying to say over and over to her. "That there Bilge Kennedy ain't got no more heart than a concrete pup, he ain't."

But saying this did not in his dream keep the two tears out of the eyes of the distressed woman-child, Minnie O'Mahony, and it did not take the terrible regret out of the mind of Ma. "Jest naturally made a plain fool of myself; jest naturally did — did — did," he kept saying to himself over and over again. "Busted me on the bean, that's what they did, huh? . . . What's this yere I'm a-layin' on?"

He thrust out an inquiring hand.

"'Tain't rocks; it's straw!" he soliloquized. "Gosh, it felt like rocks at first. Easier now, what, Old Girl! Come near bashin' your bally brains out, them spies, didn't they? Thought they had, I reckon, or they wouldn't 'a' quit. That's what you can figure about the Germans allus — allus make some miscalculation. First off it's this drive, and then it's that drive, and then it's the U-boats, and then it's the East Front, and then it's the West Front, and then it's them Eye-talians; but there's allus some figure lackin' in their addin' machines. Hell! It's up to us to lick them Germans, and here I am a-layin' here."

Ma tried experimentally to raise his head. A pungent ammonialike smell was in his nostrils. Ma sniffed it inquiringly, reminiscently.

"Smells like the donkey house," he commented. "I knowed that donkey house was somewhere round."

Wearied by this much mental effort the man dropped off to sleep and dozed painfully but restfully till wakened by an argument below, carried on in tones that sounded exceedingly familiar.

"Can it, Bilge!" said a stout voice. "You can't string me any further than right here."

"I'm not stringing you, Benny," was asseverated in hurt tones. "He's right up there over our heads now."

"If he was sick how in time would he get up there?" demanded the voice of Benny, suspicious and impatient. "I've got to hurry along."

"Ma's your best friend, except me," reproached Bilge; "and you won't climb four steps into a hayloft to answer his dying request."

"I don't hear him breathe or moan or anything," said Benny after a silence in which he had evidently been listening intently.

"He's probably too weak to move," argued Bilge mendaciously. "Maybe he's dead by now."

Ma contrived a long, blithering sigh.

"There!" exclaimed Bilge. "Hear that?"

But there was a tremble in Bilge's voice as if he had seen a ghost, and his knees joggled each other uncertainly.

"That was a donkey," theorized Benny.

"It shore was," Ma confided to himself, never too overcome by any situation to miss the humor of it, especially when the shaft pointed at himself.

"Here!" proposed Benny, exasperated. "It's getting near to nine o'clock. Give me the flash, and in four seconds I'll prove that you're a bigger liar than old Kaiser Bill."

Ma saw the tiny circle of light flickering on the rafters above him and heard quick light feet on the ladder. A moment later Benny stood in the loft with an incoherent ejaculation on his lips.

"Ma! For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed, suddenly bending over the prostrate man. "Are you dying?"

"Thank you, Benny, for comin'," said Ma faintly.

"You shore have done me a good turn."

Bilge, who had rushed hurriedly up after Benny with intent to grapple with him there, barely escaped tumbling down the ladder in his surprise and amazement at this uncanny confirmation of his supposed falsehood, but recovered himself in time.

"Ma!" he whispered hoarsely, hypocritically.

"Ma! Are you there?"

144      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

"You didn't 'low I could git away from here, did you?" reproached the prostrate and dissimulating sailor.

The quick inference that Ma, by some lucky chance asleep in the old donkey house, had overheard the colloquy with Benny, swiftly discerned the part he was to play and was doing his part like the loyal soul he was, stimulated Bilge to a rapid recovery of his own self-possession.

"Are you able to talk now, Ma? Able to tell me anything?" he inquired in tones that were cunningly freighted with the accents of anxious sympathy.

"Spies!" gasped Ma faintly. "They hit me and slung me down here. Look for a door somewheres round."

For a moment Bilge was overcome with fresh astonishment, as well as genuinely alarmed at the obvious condition of Ma; and then this surprising word about spies inflamed his mind with an instant desire for action and revenge for this assault upon his friend and upon the uniform of the United States. Snatching the flashlight from Benny's hand the rufous-headed machinist's mate swung it round him swiftly, then halted and steadied the tiny spot of light straight before him on a short door of rough planks, thick and old, but newly joined to form a door set in an opening which itself appeared to have been recently chipped in the wall about it.

"That's it," decided Ma, lifting a dizzy head for a moment. "I never seen it before, but that's it, I reckon, all right. They're somewhere to hell and gone behind that door; a room that looks out on the harbor, all fixed up with telescopes, dictaphones

and this yere invisible ink. I tied one of 'em up, but the other one clouted me and they thought I was dead."

Bilge glanced at the door and then at Ma breathing painfully after the effort of so much speech; then he swore, a low fervent oath that was almost like a prayer, and began to examine the door critically, even to thrusting his finger into the keyhole, which was so huge that it could have been fitted only by one of those giant keys that unlock garden or lodge gates in Ireland.

There was no knob or latch on the outside of the door. It offered nothing that afforded a hold. Bilge applied pressure to the door, gently, then firmly, and at last violently. It sprang slightly but did not yield.

"I better go tell the constabulary," he decided.

"The constabulary nothin'!" panted Ma. "Run quick and round up a bunch of the beach patrol. Pick the first three of em you see, and that's enough. Le's take these fellows in ourself and lead 'em up on the hill and hand 'em over to the admiral — dictaphones and invisible ink and letters and everything — just to show what us Americans is like. He likes us now, and he'll like us all the better then."

"But Benny —" began Bilge, involuntarily giving his paramount thought away, though the young man whose name had been blurted out was too excited by the spy news and too humbled by the memory of his recent incredulity to notice it.

"Sure! Benny'll stay here with me, won't you, Benny?" covered Ma cannily. "I can't be left alone, with these fellows liable to come out any minute."

"Sure," said Benny. "I've got an important engagement, but I'll stick here with you till Bilge gets back."

"Quick!" urged Ma. "The birds might get suspicious and hop the coop."

Bilge in great excitement clambered down and made a hasty exit.

"Are you much hurt, Ma?" inquired Benny, bending down anxiously.

"Hurt? I'm fakin'," snickered Ma in a contemptuous whisper. "I got a confession to make to you, Benny: I and Bilge has been buttin' in on your matrimonial intentions. We didn't want you to marry this yere girl to-night, and we framed up to git you here and kidnap you."

"You darn hounds!" exclaimed Benny, bristling like a terrier at sight of a bear.

"Wait a minute," pleaded Ma. "Don't you call no names yet. I come over to talk to your little girl this afternoon and try and reason with her; but, say, Benny, she's just the sweetest thing I ever laid eyes on, and if you don't git down out of this hay-mow and run — What time is it?"

"Five minutes to nine," said Benny, consulting his wrist.

"If you don't git down out of this donkey house and strike round the corner for the lovin', waitin' arms of Minnie O'Mahony I'll just about get up and knock your brains plumb out."

"Fell for her, hey? Some girl, what!" Benny chuckled exuberantly; and then inquired anxiously: "And it's all a stall about you being hurt, and the spies?"

"Keep that there light away. It hurts my eye,"



warned Ma in sudden fear that Benny might discern a trace of blood upon the straw at his back. "Strategy!" he continued with a grin. "When this yere Bilge Kennedy gets so bull-headed you cain't reason with him you got to resort to strategy. Hop along now, Benny, and marry that girl, and look out that you don't run into Bilge comin' back, for he'll nab you shore."

"Nab me?" said Little Benny Riley indignantly. "Lucky for him he didn't nab me! Ma, I like you, and I used to like that crazy Bilge, but if you two or either of you had interfered with me keeping faith with Minnie to-night I'd have assassinated you; that's what I'd have done — assassinated you! Get me?"

"I get you, and we'd 'a' deserved to be assassinated. I would, anyhow, because I've seen the girl. Bilge wouldn't, for he didn't have the ground to know no better. Skin out now. Leave me that light!"

"What are you going to say to Bilge when he comes back?"

Benny had paused a moment to rejoice in the discomfiture of the man who had plotted so recklessly, and yet fruitlessly, against the happiness of his heart.

"I reckon somep'n'll occur to me to say to him," drawled Ma. "Run along, I tell you!"

"But say!" proposed Benny forgivingly, "bring him round to supper. There'll be wedding eats about ten o'clock. That'll be a good way to rub it in on him."

"Eats? Where?"

"At the house!"

"But her mother's due to be raisin' the roof about that time."

"Not after Father Brown talks to her," smiled Benny confidently. "Ma, I'm sure much obliged for the good turn you've done me to-night." And the eager bridegroom wrung his shipmate's hand in brief farewell. "Eats about ten," he whispered up from the direction of the ladder, and the boson's mate heard him groping his way outward.

"So far, durned good!" Ma reflected when the prolonged silence indicated that Benny had safely departed to those loving waiting arms; and then the prostrate one began slowly to test his capabilities for action.

He flexed first one leg and then the other, and slowly rolled over. As he lifted himself on all fours the soreness in his sides made the beads of sweat stand out on his brow, but he persisted, nevertheless, and crawling painfully to the door examined it carefully for himself.

"Looks to me like this would be their main entrance," he soliloquized. "How would donkey drivin' do for a profession for a couple of spies anyhow? 'Bout the safest thing anybody could imagine, what! The inspectors watch the trains and the ships, but do they watch these country-lookin' guys that comes walkin' into town with their carts full of cabbages or spuds or whatever it is that you see 'em all the time haulin' in and out? That fellow I saw was sure a good imitation of a farmer, all right."

Ma sat back on his knees, contemplated the key-hole and calculated the size of the key that would fit it.

"The crowbar that unlocks that door must be too big to carry round with 'em," he reasoned. "They must keep it hid about the door here somewhere. If they're both inside it's inside, and if one of 'em is out it's outside. My ma used to leave the key under the doormat," his thought rambled on as he felt carefully in the straw and about the sill at the front of the door. "Or over on the top of the window frame." His fingers skirted the top of the door and the sill beneath the rafters of the donkey house. "Or"—and he shot the tiny circle of light aimlessly about the old loft—"or somewhere handy but out of sight."

Handy would be anywhere within reach in a progress from the door to the ladder. Crawling along this line across the straw Ma felt about until his hand encountered one of the supporting posts of the roof. Pulling away the straw from the base of the post his light revealed a sort of shrinkage crack between post and flooring. In the slot thus formed was the key.

"'Pears like I ain't such a gosh-danged fool after all," he murmured contentedly. "'Bout the size of the *Judson's* anchor," he commented, and sat up balancing the key.

There came a rattling of the hasp on the door below—a very slight rattling, but one that Ma's ear caught quickly, and with instant presence of mind he slipped the key back into its slot, pushed the straw over it, and rolled softly into the position in which Bilge and Benny had found him. If this was Bilge returning with reënforcements, well and good; but if it was one of the spies, all might be over with Ma. Hence these precautions. And they

150      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

were necessary, for he had hardly composed himself with the searchlight beneath him, yet ready to his hand, when there were light footsteps on the ladder. In another moment a hand was groping in the straw at the base of the post, and thereafter a light was flashed carelessly in Ma's direction.

"Dead enough, damn him!" said a voice, and then the sailorman heard the key softly inserted in the lock.

Every movement had been furtive, as if the spy were used by habit and considerable practice to make his way thus cautiously and swiftly in and out. Even the door turned noiselessly upon its hinges, and closed with a soft pish like the slow cut of a whip through the air. For a few seconds, perhaps a full minute, Ma lay perfectly still, and then without moving anything but an arm he flashed on his light and inspected the door. It was closed tight enough, but as his ears had assured him it had not been relocked. The key still stood in the outside.

"That means he's comin' back soon," argued Ma. "Where the devil is this yere Bilge? I ain't never been in a hurry to see that strawberry-headed machinist's mate but oncet or twicet in my life, but I begin to be in a hurry now."

As if to punish Ma for his impatience a donkey lifted up his voice and brayed, a whole-hearted confession of stable ennui and asinine boredom, an enormous, strident, echo-wakening heehaw that made more noise than a siren on one of the "P" boats, and startled the sailor so that cold chills chased themselves up and down his spine.

"Don't do that agin, will you, pardner?" he

murmured earnestly. "My nerves won't stand it."

But now came the welcome sound of groping feet on the cobbles without, followed presently by low voices inside. When one of these became recognizable as belonging to Bilge, Ma reached over with his flashlight and sent its rays down the ladder.

"That you, Benny?" inquired Bilge.

"Git up here quick!" ordered Ma sharply.

"You might 'a' tuck all night."

"I wanted to get my particular three patrols," apologized Bilge. "Think I'd let anybody else but *Judson* men cop off the D.C.M.'s on this raid?" And there climbed into the light Wart Kessler, Elbert Owens and Kid Maguire, each uniformed as the flotilla beach patrol is uniformed, in blues plus khaki belts and leggings, each with his short policeman's club gripped tightly, and all very excited and determined.

Bilge's return was also reënforced by the person of Dyckman, looking rather sheepish through having missed connections at first and leaving Bilge alone as the executive of their doubtful purpose upon the person of Little Benny Riley.

"Hur-r-r-s-s-sh!" whispered Ma as Bilge's tones grew too loud. "One feller's come back. He's left the key in the door, so they must figure on comin' out in a minute, prob'ly to carry my remains to the reduction works."

"What do we do then?" inquired Wart, who assumed leadership of the trio. "What's the idea?"

"Why, we just stick round," explained Ma, his voice rambling as indicating the development of no clear campaign of action; "and when he comes back we bust him on the beezer. Don't hesitate

none, you-all fellers, but bust him! He put a lump as big as an ash can on my after dome and I bled round like a stuck pig; besides which the other guy kicked in my slats so's my insides is all disarranged and I cain't set up hardly. Stand not upon the order of your bustin' either, but bust at once, the minute he opens the door."

"Isn't there some other way out of this hole of theirs?" inquired Bilge.

"There is," recalled Ma. "There is at least one other way; and here, I reckon, is a better idea than just waitin' for this guy to come back: You patrols go round to Mrs. O'Mahony's. The house is empty; most likely it's not locked. Go in and go upstairs, turn to the left — left, remember — and you'll find a door there. Go into a kind of storeroom like, full of the ghosts of cast-off furniture, and take off your shoes and keep still. Don't go gropin' round, but wait, or you'll fall over something and give the snap away. When you hear the devil of a row in front of you, why, crash, and crash quick, for that means that Bilge and Dyckman is in there givin' 'em both the Kaiser's saloot. You know what that is, don't you?"

The three patrols grinned appreciatively and prepared again to descend the ladder, when the now hypersensitive ear of Ma detected a sound somewhere back behind the door.

"Whist! Too late! They're comin' out," he whispered, and relapsed once more into the rigid figure of death, dousing the flashlight with a final wiggle of his thumb as Bilge, Dyckman and the three patrolmen flattened themselves against the wall on either side of the door.

After as much as a minute, perhaps, the door opened softly, and a man holding a light in front of him came out, and as if his business were with that grim presence yonder he pointed the luminous spot at the recumbent body of the sailor and moved two steps toward it, when Ma casually opened his eyes. The man started with a wheezing gasp at the spectacle of the dead awakening, and involuntarily recoiled, at the same time passing the light to his left hand while the right reached for his hip pocket. It engaged, however, instead of the grip of an automatic, the iron hand of Bilge.

"Quiet now," said Bilge soothingly. "Germany's game is up. This is where Uncle Sam takes on."

Dyckman at the same moment closed upon the hand holding the flashlight, in the rays of which, lifted for a moment as the spy struggled, he had a vision of three men in navy-patrol uniform with clubs poised above their heads, and a shriek, half in terror and half in warning, broke from the throat of the astounded man.

"Look out behind!" ordered Ma sharply; and the three patrolmen, leaping the struggling heap where the spy was being borne to the floor, followed a patter of scudding footsteps back along a passage and in where a door was slammed suddenly in their faces.

"Bust it!" roared Ma, who had come tottering after with his light. "Bust it quick!"

The patrolmen threw themselves against it stoutly, but it resisted all advances till, Bilge and Dyckman, coming in with a sullen prisoner, Bilge added his weight determinedly, and the panel crashed in.

"He went yon way, I reckon," said Ma, groping

excitedly for the door in the opposite wall; but the fugitive had taken advantage of the delay at the other door to barricade this one by setting a trunk or chest behind it, so that the patrolmen were still engaged in forcing a passage here when shriek on shriek came agonizing up from somewhere beyond and below.

"*Poco pronto*, there!" prayed Ma. "He's murderin' Mrs. O'Mahony. There's stairs beyond the other door. Git down quick!"

Notwithstanding his weakened condition, however, he managed to clatter down the stairs almost upon the heels of the patrolmen, his blood congealing at the thought of the carnage his eyes would encounter. Instead, he beheld the fugitive prostrate and helpless, with Mrs. O'Mahony towering over, menacing the man with the poker, with which she had evidently felled him, and upbraiding her captive in words of reviling and tones of exultation.

"Ye thafe! Ye burglar! Ye murtherin' Hun! To come sneakin' and stealin' down through people's houses," she panted hoarsely. "Ye tried to kill me, so ye did! Ye pushed me head agin the wall hard enough to crack the nut of me, ye did; and it's the deil's own child ye are by the look av ye."

Her eyes grew large and round when she beheld the four sailors tumbling down upon her.

"Mercy! Mercy me!" she breathed. "Where the old scratch did ye drop from, I want to know?"

"This yere man's a German spy 'at you've caught, Mrs. O'Mahony," said Ma politely.

"A German spy, is it?" she demanded fiercely. "Wid me own Terence a corpril in the Royal Irish Fusiliers!"



Mrs. O'Mahony made as if she would demolish the spy's head entirely with another blow of her poker, whereat the fellow howled and pleaded.

"We nabbed another in the donkey house," explained Ma, "and was chasin' this one through some kind of a misfit furniture store upstairs."

"The retirin' room of McCarthy's ghost these twinty years!" explained Mrs. O'Mahony, still laboring under great excitement. "Sure and I thought 'twas old McCarthy himself when he come at me first, till I see these little weasel eyes that was never on any McCarthy, alive or dead."

There came a thunderous banging on the door outside. "Open! Leave open in the name of the King!" was bawled sonorously and long.

"Mercy! Mercy me!" quavered Mrs. O'Mahony, glancing weakly from one face to another and then at the closed door.

"In the sacrid name of the King!" roared the voice again; and the pounding began once more upon the door.

"Open it! Open it quick!" besought Mrs. O'Mahony, who seemed at this dread hail to have lost the power of action.

Wart Kessler opened the door, and a man entered wearing the uniform of an army officer, while behind him appeared the sergeant who had done the knocking and the bawling, and who was backed by a squad of men in khaki, with a glitter of brass buttons and fixed bayonets. The officer was Captain Hobbes, a red-headed, blue-eyed, quick-thinking boy of twenty-four, who was a veteran of Mesopotamia, of Egypt and the Somme, and who, with fourteen punctures by shrapnel healing in his anat-

omy, rested from actual fighting and kept a sharp eye out at this important post for enemies of the Empire.

"I am sorray, Bridget O'Mahony," said the captain in a bored sort of way, "but it has become necessary to arrest you for harboring spies in your house."

"Harborin' spies, is it?" gasped Mrs. O'Mahony weakly. "There's niver been a man in this house in weeks excipt this craychure here wid his bleedin' head, where I give him a knock wid me poker."

At this juncture Bilge and Dyckman, who had paused to make their prisoner secure by the tying of his hands, came down the stairs and crowded into the little room.

"For the love of St. Patrick!" wheezed Mrs. O'Mahony, who was growing apoplectic.

"This yere's the other one, captain," announced Ma, with a gesture of turning over the two prisoners. "I got suspicious of these birds here this afternoon, and we been layin' for 'em."

"Good work, men," said Captain Hobbes briefly, looking a bit surprised.

Bilge, having thoughtfully brought along an armful of evidence in the way of the receiving end of a dictaphone and a rather recklessly selected miscellany of letters, bottles and chemicals from the desk, passed the whole over to a man designated by the sergeant to receive it.

"'Pears to me," reproved Ma in that slow way of his, "that you-all are sort of careless when you let guys like that come into town and carry on the way they been carryin' on."

"It may interest you, Mister Yankee Sailor," said

Captain Hobbes crisply, "to know that we have been keen after these fellows since before they came here from Dublin. We have read every line that went to them before they read it. We have read every line they sent out. We have a nice scrapbook of all the cute little letters they have been writing with invisible ink. We have only been waiting for their affiliations to develop, and we were getting ready to take them to-night. In fact —"

Captain Hobbes paused dramatically and lifted his hand, for again there was noise and clatter above, banging rifle butts, rattle of scabbards and clumping of hobnailed shoes, following which a corporal and a squad of soldiers came crowding eagerly down the stair.

"Gosh!" conceded Bilge admiringly. "You fellows are on the job all right!"

"But we just naturally beat you to it, like us Americans always does," boasted Ma, childishly proud of his achievement. "I never seen these birds till five o'clock, and yere I hand 'em over to you and all the evidence at somewheres about a quarter to ten."

"You Americans are very wonderful," admitted Captain Hobbes, smiling good-naturedly, as though he were amused rather than offended at this exhibition of Yankee-sailor assurance.

"We wouldn't 'a' been so darn wonderful, though, if Mrs. O'Mahony didn't knock this guy down with a poker, thinkin' he was a burglar," Ma admitted honestly. "He would 'a' got plumb away. You ain't so certain about wantin' to arrest her now, in them circumstances, are you?"

"Perhaps not," confessed Captain Hobbes, and

summoned his sergeant and the corporal into conference by a nod of the chin and a stride toward a corner a little apart.

Succeeding this conference the corporal and six men marched off with the prisoners and the evidence, while the captain ordered the balance of his force up the stairs to conclude the raiding of the spy's nest and made ready to follow after.

"We shall require your statements at headquarters to-morrow," he announced to the sailors.

"We shore would love to come, but I reckon that there's a subject on which you-all would wish to consult our force commander," said Ma with great dignity.

"It is," said the captain briefly. "Take the men's names," he nodded to the sergeant; and when this was done, he followed his squad clomp-clomp, rattle-rattle, up the stairs.

"It's about time we got back on our beat," suggested Wart.

"It sure is," agreed the two other patrolmen, and they hustled away, leaving Ma, Bilge and Dyckman confronting Mrs. O'Mahony, who, gradually recovering from her emotions of fear, excitement and surprise, seemed now to wonder what excuse for remaining this final trio of her guests could muster.

"Don't appear that we-all have got any particular business intrudin' on you, Mis' O'Mahony, a-clutterin' up yore settin' room," recognized Ma. "With your kind permission we'll borry the front door to git out of!"

"Help yourself!" said Mrs. O'Mahony rather dryly. "Help yourself!"

"Benny!" blurted Bilge suddenly, with an in-

quiring eye bent on Ma. "What become of Benny?"

"Benny!" exclaimed Ma. "By golly, Benny! I plumb forgot about Benny. I ain't thought about him for nigh onto an hour. You know anything about Benny, Mrs. O'Mahony?"

"Deed and I don't!" snapped Mrs. O'Mahony shortly, and then looked toward the door, for it appeared that another descent of some sort was about to be made upon her privacy.

There was a note of revelry outside, of quick steps, of rapid-fire conversation, interspersed with snatches of song and excited laughter, succeeding which there framed itself in the upper half of the door, which had been left open by the departing patrolmen, the florid, amiable face of Father Brown, with just the faintest trace of a guilty conscience in his eye, as he gazed toward Mrs. O'Mahony with an embarrassed cough and an apologetic look upon his kindly features.

"Good evenin' to ye, Father Brown!" said the widow, dropping a very humble curtsy. "Sure and I suppose 'tis your own sweet, innocent soul that's heard about the goin's on in me house to-night and has been outraged by it."

"Mrs. O'Mahony!" replied Father Brown with a swelling voice and a determined air, as if both to cry that voluble lady down and to get a doubtful business over, "I have this night married your daughter Minnie to Mr. Benjamin Riley, the Yankee sailor!"

"Father Brown!" gasped Mrs. O'Mahony, and became immediately speechless with dismay and consternation. Yet the reproach that for a moment

was in her eye faded out before the bland, steady gaze of her spiritual counselor.

"I thought it best," said the priest benignly. "Ye were far too hot against the lad. He will be a true son to ye and a faithful husband to Minnie. Good night, Mrs. O'Mahony."

"Father, father!" urged Mrs. O'Mahony, cringing as she detected the note of rebuke. "Ye will not misjudge me, will ye that? I always liked the Riley lad. 'Twas only that Patsy Cadogan —"

"Benny Riley is your daughter's husband now," interrupted the father with his most beatific smile; "and here he is with his bride, and ne'er a sweeter one ever did I see."

Under the tall priest's arm, as if they had been hiding behind the skirts of his soutane, appeared Benny and Minnie. Mrs. O'Mahony with motherly arms gathered them both unhesitatingly to her bosom, bestowing presently a kiss on Benny that knocked off his round sailor hat and added greatly to his embarrassment, a state of mind which he covered somewhat by waving his hand out the door and shouting into the darkness, "Pedro! Bring in the eats!"

Immediately there presented himself the Filipino cook of the U. S. Destroyer *Judson*, with his assistants Juan and Eduardo, grinning under burdens of various suggestive shapes. Following them crowded in half a dozen other American sailors, Jimmie Jurgenson and Bunny McIntyre leading, and each with an Irish girl by his side.

Mrs. O'Mahony fell back abashed, murmuring incoherently, while the Filipino trio took possession of the table and began to build it out with other bits

of adaptable furniture, and to spread thereon a destroyer cook's notion of a wedding supper in Ireland.

"Glory be!" sighed the widow as the feeling of helplessness and surrender to the inevitable surged again and again over her surprised and but recently embattled soul.

"Sure and the Yankees is takin' everything," she declared resignedly. "A minute ago they was takin' spies in me attic and bringin' the house down about me head. Now they might as well take my daughter and be done with it. Why, Father Brown, if one of these young sprigs should propose voylently to marry me, I have no sperrit left in me widowed heart that I should prevint them." The lady laughed hysterically.

"I believe ye, Mrs. O'Mahony," chortled the priest. "I have long perceived in yer conversation, though ye did not perceive it yourself, that ye had a secret admiration for the Yanks."

"Durned if I ever 'lowed anybody could call me a Yank half a dozen times in one night and get away with it," muttered Ma, of Texas, under his breath.

"This one in particular I've took a likin' to," said Mrs. O'Mahony, indicating the hunched and suffering Ma.

"Yes," retorted that one dryly. "You-all took a likin' to me this afternoon. You was aimin' for to express it with a bar mop."

"Oh! Acushla!" laughed Mrs. O'Mahony. "Ye should not hold an old woman's playful disposition against her. You Yanks is playful yourself."

And the lady moved off among her guests with some waking realization of the circumstances that

162      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

just now obtained in her home, and that she owed some obligations to the company in general.

"Ma," said Benny with a fond handshake, "if it wasn't for you we might not be so happy all of us to-night."

And the bridegroom turned a reproachful gaze on the rapt and transported Bilge, who from the moment his eyes fell upon the bride had suffered a strange fluttery feeling on the port side of his bosom.

"Ma? Him?" retorted Bilge, darkling quickly; "he nagged me into the scheme himself. If it wasn't for that old horned toad I would 'a' been your best man."



IV

BILGE AND MA GET A SUB

"It's a matter of luck," declared Ma. "Fool luck at that!"

"It's a matter of brains and initiative," argued Bilge stoutly.

"How are you goin' to maintain that," retorted Ma, "when the *Judson* hain't sighted a healthy oil slick even in two months, and the *McDonald* got two subs in two weeks? Don't you allow 'at Captain Bill has got as much brains and initiative as that three-striper nicknamed Fuzzy who skips the *McDonald*? Ain't the *Judson* a better boat than the *McDonald*? Ain't she got a better crew?"

"She's got you, Ma," admitted Bilge with a mischievous wink at Dyckman; "and that's sure one big advantage."

"And she's got you, Bilge; and that shore is one mighty big handicap. It's a matter o' luck, I tell you, and you're the *Jobab*. Why don't you get yourself transferred or picked for one of these nucleus crews that's goin' home all the time for new boats? Captain Bill's dyin' to git the best of you, and he just naturally ain't got the heart to tell you so."

"How do you reckon that he's dying to get rid of me?" cross-examined Bilge.

"Well, wasn't you at the throttle when we salted up that last time?"

"And I suppose, you durn deck washer, you think it was the man at the throttle's fault when

that tube in the condenser splits and we salt up, hey?" retorted Bilge scornfully. "That's just about the level of your intelligence, ain't it now?"

"I'm not talkin' about intelligence," responded Ma. "I just naturally admit that I ain't got none or I wouldn't never 'a' sailed on a destroyer in these here pirate-infested European waters with a man like you in the engine room. Why say, Bilge, if we was to sight a submarine — if we was to get a real good chance to just naturally back right up and drop an ash can on one, and you was the only man on 'board that could drop the can, why, we couldn't find you nowheres round. You'd be off up in the fo'castle head asleep, or playin' with your pet rat, or figurin' out one of them wonderful schemes of yourn for puttin' salt on the tail of a submarine and catchin' him in your mother's apron."

"A submarine could be caught, with a little ingenooity — that's what I argue," persisted Bilge, catching at the thread of some past discussion. "I say that a submarine is the most helpless fish that floats in the sea, and that if you went at 'em right you could take 'em practically with your bare hands."

"And I allow then," resumed Ma, "that if the chance ever comes for you to git a submarine you'll just naturally jump in and pitch him out, the way we-all pitch out a catfish down in my country when the streams git dry."

"I never said nothin' like it," maintained Bilge stubbornly. "But I got my idea. I said they was helpless and they could be gathered in alive."

Ma relapsed into an amused silence and the measured puffing of his pipe, while he contemplated his

friend with an air of affectionate indulgence. Bilge finding himself no longer opposed turned after a concluding grunt to fumble in his locker for pencil and paper, after finding which he sat upon the locker, with his ditty box in his lap for a writing table, and bent himself to the development of a poetic theme which had been running through his head all day and had to do with setting forth the spirit and prowess of the enlisted men of the destroyer flotilla.

For a time something approaching silence reigned in the fo'castle where the recent debate had taken place. Men crouched or lounged about on their sea chests, reading, writing, or playing cards — with frequent muttered ejaculations — or they pulled down their swinging bunks of wire and crawled creakingly into them to sink to slumber.

"Here!" proclaimed Bilge, after mayhap half an hour of tongue-biting labor. "Lamp these lines, will you?" And he lifted a soiled sheet of paper and began to declaim:

Ho, we fight with our hands and we fight with our feet,  
 We fight with our heads and our hearts;  
 Ho, we slam the Hun and we slam him neat  
 With a bomb in his innard parts.

"Durned good, Bilge!" vouchsafed Ma. "Who-all did you copy that off of?"

"I didn't copy it," protested Bilge. "Got her up myself. Ain't she some sweet little ditty, though? Now if I could get a tune to her we could sing it. How was one of those marching tunes —"

"But say!" Ma broke in to resume the thread of the old argument. "'With a bomb in their innard



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5

1.5



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

parts.' That ain't takin' 'em alive, you know, old red-top."

Bilge paused, sucking his stub of a pencil and frowning at the alleged inconsistent line.

"But, friend of my heart," he retorted presently, "we'd bomb 'em after we took 'em, wouldn't we? You would never do nothing to one of these *unterwasser* pirates but bomb him, would you?"

"I wouldn't — no!" responded Ma decisively.

"You bet it's good!" admitted Bilge modestly as he hummed over the lines.

"George Cohan got twenty-five thousand for 'Over There,'" suggested Ma dryly, as he noted the care with which Bilge deposited his effusion in his ditty box and then inserted the ditty box in the sea chest.

"This is prob'ly too good poetry to make a popular song," conceded Bilge, not noting the subtle poison of mockery in Ma's remark; "but the gobs in the flotilla will all be hummin' it in a week — just as soon as I find the right tune to it."

Bilge pulled down his sleeping apparatus from its moorings overhead and rolled into it to blissful slumber, knowing with his last waking moment that delicious glow which pervades the tissues of the creative artist in the hour of glorious consummation.

But while Bilge and Ma and their comrades slumbered Captain Bill and Captain Fuzzy foregathered in a corner of the Royal Yacht Club with other destroyer captains, and consumed much British good cheer as they recounted their joys, their hopes and their hard luck. Captain Fuzzy of them all was in most exultant mood, for the fishing had been poor of late with his companions.

"I'll bet you, Bill," he said — this Captain Fuzzy of the *McDonald*, who had got two submarines in two weeks, to Captain Bill of the *Judson*, who had not seen a live oil slick in six — "I'll bet you five pounds the *McDonald* gets her third sub before you get the first."

"Oh, oh! Hear him! The swank of him!" jeered the crowd.

"Take you!" said Captain Bill, his smooth hard jaws knitting a bit snappishly; whereupon the slightly stimulated convivialists turned ficklely on him with some lugubrious lines which had reference to an exceedingly weird report of Captain Bill's about a supposed encounter with a supposed submersible of the Kaiser's back in the early days of the war — meterless rimes which began with reciting that:

Last night over by Aberdeen  
I saw a German submarine;  
The funniest sight I ever seen  
Was Old Bill Brads:aw's submarine!

There were other stanzas, but they were in kind, and the composition was so bad that nobody had the ill taste to finish it; so they lifted their grape-juice glasses and pledged a health to Captains Bill and Fuzzy and all other good three-stripers who took the sea in the morning to do battle with the elements and the Hun.

Five o'clock next morning found the officers of the *Judson* gathering in the wardroom for a waking cup of coffee and a staying slice of toast. Darkness prevailed outside and uncertainty within; for though the captain knew the hour of his sailing, which was

approximately at daylight, he knew not the purport thereof, whether for convoy duty, for patrol work or for something special and more directly promising. Not knowing, he could imagine and he could hope, which he did, with that wager with Captain Fuzzy in his mind and a certain delicious sense of expectancy tickling all his nerves.

He was a square-rigged figure of a man, was Captain Bill, with square shoulders and square jaw, but not a square head. He did not look so trim as, for instance, a battleship or cruiser captain. The lower half of him was clothed in khaki trousers, and on his feet were huge storm boots. The upper half of him did indeed include the regulation fatigue blouse of the officer; but where it was buttoned tight at the throat the points and a bit of the rim of a khaki shirt collar projected, lending a note of picturesque untidiness, as indicating that the captain was dressed for work rather than parade, for comfort rather than for sweet appearance's sake. This same rough-and-ready look was manifested by other members of his staff who sat about him at the ward-room table, all with sleep still in their eyes — excepting only the man who had been on watch — and each in his costume revealing some reckless but practical departure from the regulations.

A messenger appeared, saluted and mumbled something to McMaster, the ordnance officer — who was an abrupt sort of personality known to the crew as Shotgun — something about a torpedo director having been put on upside down.

“Well, blankety-blank!” exclaimed Shotgun, his rasping voice of anger breaking the silence rudely, and taking little account, it would seem, of



the respect due the man who captained the destroyer and headed the table.

But the captain was quite unruffled. He joined in the smile that went round the table over the petulance of McMaster, who, scowling, left his coffee and toast to go aft and let his voice be heard, bellowing and barking amid a lot of scurrying seamen who were busy with the lashing and unlashng, the securing and unsecuring, the thousand and one things that human hands are required to do about the deck fixtures and fighting equipment of a ship of war when she makes ready for the sea.

With McMaster's voice still echoing another messenger entered and handed a white slip of paper to the captain. It read:

From To  
 U. S. S. JUDSON  
 Proceed QXY. On reaching 116 report. Urgent.

QXY was a definite area in the sea outside; 116 was a very definite spot in that area. Urgent meant that the *Judson* was not to pause to gather any daisies on the way to 116, but get there.

Captain Bradshaw read the message without comment and passed it to King, executive and navigator. While he scanned it Eddy, the chief engineer, entered, the only man on the ship who had been too busy with preparations to get under way, to sit down and receive fortification for his duties at the hand of the Filipino mess boy.

"Permission to turn the engines over?" the chief inquired.

"Yes," nodded the captain.

The chief engineer went out. One by one the

## 170 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

other officers rose and stepped away, each to his duties, while McMaster came back to his unfinished plate.

The entry of the ordnance officer was followed by another messenger and another message, indicating that the intelligence station upon the hill, where dwelt the man with the wide gold band upon his arm and the far-reaching brain that controlled all this splendid organization, was fairly busy this morning. The message said:

From	To
U. S. S. JUDSON	
On reaching 116 QXY establish communication with SRNV. Urgent.	

SRNV was Captain Fuzzy's ship, the *McDonald*. "Hell's bells!" ejaculated Captain Bill. "They sent her out ahead of us. Did Fuzzy know something, I wonder, when he bet me that five pounds?"

It was perhaps ten minutes after this, and the captain with his second cigarette in his lips was in the chart room, where Kirk was straddling a pair of compasses across a chart to the QXY area and locating therein the exact spot 116, that a third message was brought in:

SRNV asking what time you can be at 116. Urgent.

"That's three times now they've snapped that word 'urgent' at us," remarked the captain. "Sounds like something doing 'ut there."

"Yes," said Kirk, turning from his chart to a hopeful contemplation of the message, while the cap-

tain stepping outside pattered lightly upward to the bridge.

The bridge of an American destroyer to-day has been hooded and closed in with a sheet-steel structure to give weather protection to the instruments and occupants thereof, with the result that it is less like a bridge and more like an elevated oblong coop, with an octagonal side to the front and a semi-circular slot at the eaves through which observation is obtained.

The bridge was now thickly populated. A quartermaster was at the wheel, a yeoman was at the engine-room annunciator, a bunting tosser was at the signal locker, and three or four sailors with binoculars or telescopes were ready for lookout duty, while a lieutenant and a surplus ensign or two were also at hand, binocular-armed but ready for any service that might be required of them. The captain, hands in pockets, cap slightly to starboard, cigarette holder in mouth, the corners of that khaki shirt collar projecting grotesquely, walked to and fro with an eye over the fo'castle head to where the anchor chain was coming in from the buoy.

"All clear, sir," called the voice of the boson's mate.

The captain's own hand pulled the whistle cord, and the ship stirred and shook herself as side lines were cast off. The skipper now stood alert, watching keenly the first slow drift of his boat, calculating the force of the tide and holding a quiet and entirely one-sided conversation with the yeoman whose hands were on the annunciator.

"Full speed astern — starboard full ahead — starboard stop — port one-third ahead — port stop — starboard two-thirds astern."

## 172      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

So jockeying and dancing the *Judson* wormed out of her stall, waltzed clear of her stable mates, nosed round the mother ship, and headed for the line of buoys that marked a circuitous passage to the open sea.

The harbor entrance was gained and left behind; breakfast came and was devoured, the captain taking his in the chart room; messages were sent and messages were received; SRNV reported her hands full and sliced off a distinct patch of the sea for the *Judson*. It was in this patch of sea as the radio presently reported that the exciting thing had happened, and the captain's eye glinted eagerly as he read the word, after which he gave certain necessary instructions to the engine room and to the wheel.

Eight o'clock came, bringing with it Bilge's relief, so that the machinist's mate clambered up the iron ladder from the engine room and sat upon the hatch to look about and get a bite of the outside air. Bilge was clad in dungarees and an undershirt, armless and exceeding thin. His freckles were ambushed beneath a coat of grease and grime, while even the pristine redness of his luxuriant hair appeared to have been somewhat subdued by contacts below stairs as if he had used it for a mop.

They were in the midst of waters. No land was in sight. The sea was choppy gray, gray as the wing of a gull, and it stretched about them interminably. Through it without a jar or a bound, with scarcely a quiver, the *Judson* slipped like a long mottled green mackerel, making thirty knots, which for the *Judson* was emergency speed.

The machinist's mate looked up inquiringly at the

bridge with an air of importance and responsibility. It was he who had lifted her along turn by turn to this thirty knots. Did they know it? Did they appreciate it up there?

Now to be rigidly truthful, of course this was merely Bilge's point of view. It really wasn't he who had done this. It was some boys in a red-hot boiler room, entered through doubled seal-tight doors which maintained the air at high pressure, who kept the flames going, not with the labor of shoveled coal but by the skillful manipulation of two sets of valves, one of which dribbled crude oil and the other of which admitted sprays of compressed air that vaporized the oil and carried it in the form of a cloud of fuel to the fire boxes. But besides the fire boys there were the water boys who nursed the big condenser, and there were the oilers and the machinists, and all the rest of the score of men on watch at one post or another down there in the intestines of the ship, each of whom had done his part in the manufacture of all this power.

But it was Bilge who had stood at the throttle and given the steam to the turbines; Bilge who had stood at the speaking tube and answered the questions of the bridge and told it what the engines were doing; so now, with the feel of a commander in his heart, he had turned the throttle over to his successor, knowing that under his coaxing hand the propellers were getting every turn that was in the power, and the total of those turns figured seven revolutions under thirty knots; so Bilge called it thirty knots and done, and had come creeping up the ladder to look about him and watch the gray seas

174      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

slipping by as if the *Judson* were standing still and all the whole wide ocean racing to get past it.

As Bilge took his seat on the sharp edge of the engine-room hatch his friend the boson's mate sauntered over. Ma had just been watching the carpenter's mate attaching a set of nice new brass figures to the prow of the motor dory. This number was, we will say, 198, and the one we will say, was the identification number of the *Judson*, with which brand her small service boats were also labeled. Yet while these new and more highly ornamental numbers had been going on the prow of the dory it was nevertheless a matter of fact that the carpenter's mate as he drilled his holes in the wood was not thinking of what he was doing. When he drove home the screws and countersunk them neatly just to the level of the surface of the plate he was doing it mechanically.

Ma, the boson's mate, who watched him do the job, watched mechanically, and as much as anything else just to rest his eyes from continually staring off there into the greasy haze that lay ahead of them, and into which the *Judson* was rushing with every turn of her screws. It was on the adventure just ahead that every mind in the ship was set. There was nothing posted on the bulletin board but everybody knew. The radio room was aft. In it an ensign and three enlisted men hovered over the instruments. From it messengers came and went. Who told? Nobody — exactly. Who whispered or leaked? Nobody — exactly. Yet from end to end the ship knew. It was its business to know.

It had not been necessary to waken the men of the eight-to-twelve watch. They were roused and

rearing waiting to take their stations. Nor did the men they relieved bolt a hasty breakfast and fling into their bunks like exhausted sodden things.

Instead they moved out upon the fo'castle or found places to sit on hatches or places to lean against guns, torpedo tubes, and plastered their eyes ahead, with occasional inquiring looks upward to the bridge.

There Captain Bill was in high spirits. His nerves were strung like a bow. He had waited long for his chance. To-day — in an hour — in fifteen minutes — in that undefined patch of gray haze ahead his chance was waiting for him.

To Bilge, too, a mere cog in this thrillingly efficient machine, it seemed that his chance was coming. It was for this he had enlisted, for this he had eaten the bread of humble obedience to another man's orders, for this he had worked slavishly days on end, for this he had fought the storms and the ennui and the heartburnings of homesickness; for this he had taken the back talk of chief petty officers, had penned himself up in the narrow bowels of a destroyer and endured all that the enlisted man feels he has to endure — that his country might win, that humanity might win, and the savage Hun be beaten.

The deck rose and fell gently to the long rhythm of the *Judson's* forward leap. Bilge beat his knees slightly, and felt that the wings of his spirit rose and fell, majestic and strong. It was a great moment — a great thrill that was coming.

"Be on top of her soon now, eh?" he said to Ma.

"Yeh! I reckon so," conceded Ma, expectant but unexcited. "Yeh! I reckon we will."

But there was no badinage, no idle speech. Men held their tongues and waited. And now they were there!

Wreckage floated past — an overturned boat, a chicken coop, the shattered half of a gangplank, barrels, rafts, boxes, boards, and an indescribable jumble of the things a ship contains which float off when she slips beneath the waves. The sea was filled with wreckage. This was the very water and these were the silent witnesses when, a scant three hours before, while the *Judson's* wardroom was at its coffee, men had fought for life amid the broken members of their torpedoed boat. Even now it seemed that their dumb lips pleaded for punishment for their treacherous and cruel enemy. And already, too, the avengers were gathering.

An airplane circled overhead, with the bold insignia of Britain upon her wide wings. A dirigible balloon floated in the lower atmosphere, peering deep for any sign of that dark moving shadow which would hint the presence of the submarine. Bilge and Ma were gaping at the sights about them when general quarters was sounded with one long discordant shriek of the whistle.

Instantly there was a vast hurry and scuttle from end to end of the boat. Men went flying to their stations. McMaster was running for the after bridge and more immediate control of his depth charges. Ensign Trigg charged along the deck, fighting like a football player for his way through jostling groups of men who were crowding about guns and torpedo tubes. Gunners were swiftly spinning controlling wheels as their weapons were ranged or pointed, and the torpedo men leaped to



their places in the saddle and with tubes swung out sat like jockeys awaiting the fall of the starter's flag.

Ma's battle station was the starboard waist gun.

"What's it?" demanded Bilge of the charging ensign. In such moments of excitement distinctions of rank are sometimes forgotten, even by ensigns, and the single-striper was more human than he was official anyway.

"Submarine broaching dead ahead!" he called back.

"G-r-r-r-r!"

There rose from all the assembled crews a guttural roar of thirst for vengeance, mixed with exultation that at last the time had come to gratify it. Bilge, whose battle station when not on watch was loose proximity to the engine-room companion, leaned out on a boat davit and set his eyes ahead. Once in a while he discerned a black speck rising and falling on the waves.

"Well, why don't they shoot?" he demanded impatiently.

The bow gun and the starboard waist gun were already trained upon it. Lieutenant Cherry from the crow's nest kept calling down the range.

"Set sir! Set!" reported Dickey Dorgan through his speaking tube, and was praying for the order to fire.

But no order came, and presently word was passed down from the bridge: "It's a lifeboat."

A groan went up from gun and torpedo crews, seasoned with curses of baffled rage; and then curiously all studied the boat which the *Judson* was rapidly overhauling. As it careened on the slope

of a wave when they passed, something huddled in the bottom — awash, for both ends of the craft were splintered as if by shell fire. The *Judson* turned and came back to windward, slowing as she did so for the launching of a boat.

“Man the whale and lower away!” ordered the captain.

This was the boson’s mate’s job naturally, and Ma with six men at the oars went down the falls, standing as proudly in the stern as ever an admiral on quarter-deck. As the boat cast off the *Judson* began immediately to take on speed, which was prudent, for a stopped or slow-moving destroyer makes an inviting target for a torpedo; and again wreckage began to flow past, each piece of it curiously scanned by everybody on the ship. Prominent in this stream just now was a huge hatch cover, and upon it lay a coil of rope as it had evidently lain before the hatch cover floated free. Upon this the keen eyes of Bilge discovered something white, a tiny shivering mass that hugged cautiously the rope coil in the center of the floating rectangle.

“A dog!” somebody shouted.

“A pup!” amended a voice from the bridge; and pup it was, a tiny wire-haired fox terrier, bewildered, cold, water-soaked and feeling no doubt very much abused to be left thus lonely and abandoned in the midst of this waste of waters. He watched so intently and apprehensively the encroachment of the waves as from time to time they threatened his position in the center that the weirdly decorated body of the *Judson* was almost over him before he noticed its presence, with a line of human beings along its side which his brief life had taught him to recognize

as kin, gazing at him sympathetically from deck and bridge.

Up to this moment the pup had cowered timidly, but with the knowledge that he was under observation an instant consciousness of the blood of a royal fighting line within him seemed to assert itself. He stood stiffly on his small legs, his aristocratic stub of a tail was lifted, and his ears, black like spots of camouflage against his white body, went up, and he posed bravely as though none should see him exhibit other than a stout defiance to his fate. He barked a greeting at them excitedly in a hoarse little voice, which told the story of a cold and chilling vigil and the despair which had all but settled in his heart.

While the ship passed he advanced bravely to the edge of his raft and lifted up his face and then his voice in eager yapping little cries, as of cordial hail and stout farewell to fellow voyagers on a vast and watery sea. There was no whimper of fear in the voice, but there was infinite appeal in it — the appeal of high stout courage, the cry of comrade to comrade across the waters, and the modest expression of a yearning not to be abandoned if rescue were perfectly convenient.

"Permission to get the pup, sir?" said a husky voice; and the captain, watching from the bridge, looked round to see that Bilge in his dungarees had come rushing up the ladder.

Now the captain of a destroyer is inevitably a young man. No other kind will do — a young man with tireless muscles, with eager enthusiasms, with ready sympathies, who acts like a flash and does his repenting, if repenting is necessary, well and after the act. Neither, upon a destroyer, is there that

insistence upon the refinements of formality which obtains in larger battle craft. There is discipline, the absolute mastery of the man on the bridge, and the swift and instinctive obedience of every man below him; but what might be called the frills and fringes of the disciplinary establishment are sometimes lacking.

In coming unbidden to the bridge upon a purely personal quest Bilge Kennedy, machinist's mate, had transgressed, but in revealing how ready and how sincere was the sympathy that dwelt within him for the small and dumb and helpless he had justified his coming.

"Yes," said Captain Bill, short and gruff, to mask the feeling of softness that was in his heart.

It had not occurred to him just how Bilge was meaning to get the pup. He did not particularly consider. That a ship at sea in the midst of wreckage and perhaps human flotsam should stop to rescue a puny little dog, thereby exposing to possible submarine attack a healthy unit in Uncle Sam's destroyer flotilla, was quite absurd. It was contrary to the rules of war and the tenets of strategy made and provided. The captain instantly swept his eye away to the larger concerns of the moment — to the fields of possible enemy action, to the whaleboat making a rhythmic-oared progress toward the water-logged craft, and then off to where the dirigible swung in the air and made signals from time to time, which the bunting tosser was reading and calling off as he got them.

Bilge, however, running aft along the deck, was somehow shedding his shoes as he ran, and a cheer broke from the men on the after bridge and about

the depth-charge racks when he went overboard with a splash and began to swim with long expert strokes toward the hatch cover.

The pup seemed to understand the maneuver at once. He again moved close to the edge of his small craft, and his eyes watched intently that dark spot upon the water where Bilge made progress toward him. Sometimes the long swells let the swimming machinist's mate down into a cradle where he was out of sight, and sometimes they lifted him high on a crest where the little dog caught sight of him again and yapped an eager cry of encouragement and welcome. The men on the deck of the *Judson* shouted joyously as they saw Bilge make the hatch cover and the little dog caper excitedly about his arms and head.

"I would disrate him for that!" scowled the exec.

"Tut, tut!" chided the captain with a sort of gulp in his throat. "Gad! It's a wonderful spirit, that; that will jump overboard in the middle of the Irish Sea for a wet forlorn little pup. What chance has Germany got against men like that? None at all, I tell you!"

But just then the men in the dirigible balloon seemed to get very excited about something. The eye of their blinker system began to wink very rapidly. The signal man in the *Judson* who read its message became excited also as he translated to the captain. Captain Bill's eyes lighted freshly.

"Here's where I win that five pounds," he chuckled, and then uttered some short sharp words to the men at the annunciator and wheel, so that the *Judson* was picking up speed like a Liberty Motor and coming about for a straightaway dash

182      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

down where the men in the dirigible were having their little cat fit.

The first hint Ma had that he and his boat's crew were to be temporarily abandoned in midchannel was when he saw the *Judson* go whizzing round him like a long chameleon-hued ghost, during which maneuver Jimmy Roser wigwagged him from the port wing of the bridge: "Pick up Bilge on raft three hundred yards to starboard and hold position. Will return and take you up."

"Bilge on raft — three hundred yards to starboard," muttered Ma in amazement. "The durn poet must 'a' fell overboard."

"Bilge went overside to rescue pup," Jimmy added, of his own motion, by way of postscript information.

Standing up Ma made out the form of a man signaling to him from the top of a wave.

"The durn dog catcher can just stay there a while till I get through with my present business," the boson's mate decided and, while holding his craft on its way toward the water-logged boat but with none of his oarsmen hurrying because of what they feared to find there, he permitted his own eyes to wander off in pursuit of the *Judson*, already half a mile away and kicking up a wake of foam that to the boat's crew was sufficient evidence of the importance of the errand upon which she was going.

"That old sausage down there must 'a' sighted the sub," Ma remarked wistfully. "Wisht I was on board"; and he gazed forlornly southward while the *Judson* streaked it another mile into the haze.

"Listen to that now!" ejaculated Spud Murphy, as an echo rattled and rolled in the clouds above

them. "They're shootin'! There's another. Gosh! I never did have any luck."

A sound like a faint cough came back across the waves.

"What do you think of that now?" demanded Dyckman. "Sub shooting back at a destroyer."

"Must be one of them big cruisers with the five-inch guns," reasoned Ma. "Figures 'at she can out-range us, I reckon. Well, ain't this yere a yell of a mix-up? The *Judson* yonder shootin' and gettin' shot; us here puddlin' along on a fool's errand to look over a lot of dead men in a boat; and old Bilge, the fightin'est man of us all, yonder on a raft rescuin' a fool dog."

"Bilge would go farther after a dog than he would a human beir' any day," suggested Spud.

"This ain't war. It's farce comedy," decided Ma disconsolately.

"It's always just like that," volunteered Bunny McIntyre eagerly as he eased up on his oar. "It's that way at the Front in France, the fellers at the French base tell me. It's all kind of crazy. One minute you're sweatin' round because you lost your spoon, or you can't find one of your socks, or you're worrying because M Company got an Athletics' pitcher in the new draft and how in time are you going to win that fifteen francs if they stick this new pitcher in the game to-morrow; and then all at once shells are dropping on you and hell's popping everywhere, and socks or no socks, spoon or no spoon, pitcher or no pitcher, you hop up and go over, fighting like the very devil and wading up to your knees in blood maybe. Then in an hour it's back to the same old story; you're dead and you

don't give a damn, or you're off to the hospital where a man with a pair of sugar tongs is picking pieces out of you, or else you're beefing and belly-aching along in the same old trenches with the same old troubles, howling like a colicky baby because the rats have et the filling out of your alcohol stove, and while you're drinking your coffee cold you can't help but wonder if the alcohol made the rodents drunk or not. That's the way it always goes."

"Well, if you make that oar of yourn go a little faster and your tongue go a little less we'll git to where we're a-travelin' some considerable quicker," rebuked Ma sternly. "You shore are some little philosopher though, ain't you, Bun?"

"The point is," argued Bunny, "you can't never figure what's going to happen next, nor how it's coming off. Things break out the way you can't never imagine 'em at all. There's Bilge going after the dog and the *Judson* going after the sub, right here in the same little back yard, you might say."

"But with this difference," piped Dyckman, who was in a hyperpessimistic mood through not liking to row: "Bilge got the dog. I can see him once in a while holding it up to us; but the *Judson* hasn't got the sub."

"How d'you know?" Instinctively six pairs of eyes turned off southward.

"Well, she's not firing any more."

"She may have got the sub."

"One thing's sure — the sub didn't get the *Judson*. I can make her out, all right. But gee! She must be four miles away, and I suppose the sub was five miles off when she began cracking away."

"Steady now!" ordered Ma sharply. "Back



water. Take the boat hook there, Spud, and hold alongside, but keep her off, so one of these lazy ones don't roll us all over on top of her."

These remarks of the boson's mate were of course apropos of having arrived alongside the water-logged boat toward which they had been pulling.

"Gosh!" gasped Spud, standing up. "They's bodies in it."

Exploration with the boat hook, however, revealed that this was a mistake. There was a wash of heterogeneous things, but no bodies — some storm coats, a collapsed suitcase, torn asunder as if by shell fire, a woman's jacket, a life preserver, and on the end of the boat hook a baby's knitted cap.

"Gosh!" gasped Spud again.

Human life had been here but it was gone. How? Conjecture was easy, but unpleasant. Perhaps, shrinking from the shrapnel, the occupants had leaped overboard to a kinder death in the waves; or perhaps —

"Shove off!" ordered Ma. "It makes me sort of sick. Le's go and get Bilge. How I hate a Hun!"

They went and got Bilge, and they were telling him about the boat, with the splintered ends, with the shattered suitcase and the woman's jacket and the baby's cap. Bilge's blue eyes blazed.

"Holy Father in heaven," he said, "but I'd like to get 'em!"

This was not profanation. It was prayer.

"Look!" exclaimed Spud excitedly. "Look!"

Every eye followed the thrust of his agitated finger to where, two hundred yards away, a stubby periscope had broken the surface and was turning gradually in their direction.

"The other submarine!" murmured Bilge in awe-struck tones. "The radios said there was two of them in this area."

The thing was still rising in the water, but with observation tubes telescoping as the craft rose, in order to decrease its own visibility as much as possible; for it mounted until two feet of the bridge was above the surface. At the same time it was straightening out its course, increasing speed and bearing directly down upon the men in the boat.

They stared at it curiously, helplessly, wondering at what moment a squad would emerge and demand their surrender or assail them with rifle fire. But no sign of the crew was apparent. Yet the submersible came straight on, faster and faster, that wedge-like prow at the base of the bridge fashioning itself into a relentless instrument of destruction.

"It's going to ram us!" the men murmured weakly, one to another.

"Hell's cahoots!" exclaimed Ma, excited for once in his life, as he discerned the meaning of this maneuver. "Back water, there! Back water for your life! Now — now let her come round! Lay off on your starboard oars. Pull like hell to port! Now — now!"

The whaleboat swung to starboard just in time to escape the peril of that axlike prow.

"Ain't she the helpless thing though!" Ma snorted, breathing quickly but turning a sarcastic eye on Bilge in malicious memory of that argument of the night before. "*Judson's* three miles away now if she's a mile. Dirigible is one mile away if she's a hundred yards. Airplane? Where — where in thunder is that darned airplane?" Ma lifted his

chin and searched the sky. "Plumb out o' sight. That's the way with these hundred-mile-an-hour machines. One minute she's here and the next minute she's hoverin' over Liverpool."

"But," argued Bilge hopefully, "the next minute she's back here maybe."

"Look! The beggar is turning and coming back at us!" stammered Dyckman.

"You're an able navigator, Ma," encouraged Bilge. "You dodged him once. I bet you can dodge him again."

"You fellows git up on your toes," the boson's mate demanded of his oarsmen. "I bet I kin too."

"Ain't this war comedy, though, just like I told you?" broke out the philosophic Bunny. "Look at us out here playin' pussy wants a corner with a submarine, and balloons and airplanes and the *Judson* with guns and torpedoes and ash cans all round us but just out of hailing distance."

"I look for 'em to turn a machine gun on us pretty soon," said Spud, eyeing the veering submarine apprehensively.

"Ain't it funny about these damn Huns?" observed Bunny, still reflective. "They'll try to smash the boat and drown us all, but they won't open up and pick us off with a rifle. They got compunctions about that apparently."

"They got compunctions about coming up high enough to open the hatches for fear the balloon will sight them," growled Spud.

"Yes, or compunctions about shootin' off rifles or machine guns, for fear the balloon'll hear it and wigwag the *Judson* and she'll turn and drop a shell on 'em."

"Here she comes back again!"

Once more the pronglike prow came stabbing down upon them, and again Ma by clever seamanship maneuvered his boat to one side, though this time she was nearly capsized by the wake. For a moment there was no conversation in the whaleboat. Every face was white, mouths were open, men gasped for breath and looked into each other's eyes curiously. Ma's spirit, however, was still stout. After a moment he could even indulge another shaft of sarcasm.

"Ain't they the helpless little things though?" he demanded. "What are you so still for, Bilge? What you thinking about? Ain't scared, are you?"

"Plumb to hell and gone," admitted Bilge, his teeth chattering. "Ma, I haven't never been so scared in all my life before. Not even in a dream, I haven't."

"Well, you shore are honest, for once in yore misspent life," responded Ma. "I admire you for it, Bilge. You give me courage to speak the truth too. I am just so dog-goned scairt that —"

"I got an idea, though," blurted Bilge suddenly. "Quick! Quick! It's a pippin too! Pull over there to that hatch cover with the coil of rope on it."

"Clean nutty, ain't you?" reproved Ma witheringly.

"I suppose yore idea is to tie on to the sub's propeller and then it can't ram us because it keeps pullin' us out of its own reach all the time. Sort of a game of pussy chasin' its tail, huh?"

"Get over there, fellows, quick, will you?" pleaded Bilge before replying, and as if any diversion, no matter how sterile and unpromising, were

preferable to the dread suspense of waiting to be rammed or fired upon by the submarine, the men bent to their oars while Ma swung the tiller.

"That's just all the strategical imagination you've got now," chided Bilge. "You're figuring to keep the submarine from getting us. I figure to get the submarine."

Ma said nothing at all to this, but contrived to look extremely bored and disconsolate.

"You haven't got the proper faith in brains and initiative, Ma," complained Bilge.

"You haven't got no proper brains at all," peevish Ma.

"The *Judson's* coming this way fast," reported Bunny, taking a squint over his shoulder. "The balloon must have seen the sub."

"This U-pirate's got about one more chance at us," calculated Bilge, "and if he misses that he's done. He's got to get down. Then it's our turn."

"Then he'll open up the hatch and turn loose on us with the rifles," declared Ma dejectedly.

"Just about," admitted Bilge. "But we can all pile over the off side and let him whang away. He'll have to submerge before he can pick off a single one of us. I'm going to put a ball and chain on him."

"What's your scheme?" inquired Ma, with a sudden change from mocking pessimism to respectful interest as they again swung alongside the hatch cover.

"Watch me!" crowed Bilge. "Just watch me!" Swiftly he was tying the end of that coil of line about the middle of an oar.

"Here!" he said, thrusting the oar into Ma's

hand. "Now when the sub comes at you next time don't back off so sharp. Kind of swing alongside and pitch this oar through under his jump wire. It'll turn crossways and the angle of the wire and the drive of the boat will pull it under till it comes to where the jump wire is made fast to the deck. There it'll jam and hold like an anchor just as long as the sub keeps pulling on it."

"But —" Ma began to object.

"But nothing. I'm going over the side now and make the other end of that coil fast to the ring in the hatch cover. There's three hundred feet of line in that coil if there's an inch. The sub can't go down more than three hundred feet, so we've got a permanent marker on him. Here! Out of the way, pup!"

In another second Bilge was on the hatch cover searching for the inner end of the coil and tying it in the ring.

"Pull away now," he ordered. "I've got to keep the line running free."

"Well, I'll be blowed plumb up to heaven with a depth charge," exclaimed Ma, "if that there nut hain't got hold of a perfectly reasonable idea. All we got to do now is to put it over. Up on your toes again, you-all. Remember, we got to keep her broadside on till the bridge gits apast us, so's I can tuck the oar under the jump rope. It don't make no difference if we do upset after that, because if they miss they'll be shootin' at us in ten seconds anyhow, and we got to take to the water. Everybody kick their shoes off and stand for a duckin', and not a man of you get hisself drowned or I'll — I'll — durned if I know what they do to a gob for

gettin' hisself drowned, but I'll put you on report for it, anyhow."

The cold impersonal eye of the periscope bore down, staring at them mockingly.

"Reckon they're on to our scheme?" inquired Bunny.

"On? I reckon not. They ain't smart enough. Just naturally ain't."

A humming sound came down from above.

"Airplane's back," affirmed Spud, sparing one glance for the upper regions.

"They'll see him and get under quick's they can," opined Ma. "But they'll take a shot at us before they duck. The sky pilot can't drop a bomb for fear of hittin' we all."

The conning tower split viciously through the waves with a loud ripping sound. The whaleboat swung, careened, righted, grated on an edge of passing steel and with a sharp pop crumpled up like paper and rolled right through under the jump wire, so that all Ma had to do was to let go of his oar to make sure of its performing its intended function. For a moment there was wild scrambling in the water, and the voice of Bilge rang out from his observation post on the hatch cover.

"My pup! Save my pup!" he was shouting; and he continued to shout thus till suddenly the hatch cover leaped from under him like a thing alive, with Bilge describing strange acrobatic stunts as he screamed frantically: "Dive! Dive or it'll hit you."

There was an instant scattering of the heads and hands that a moment before had been clinging to the wreckage of the overturned boat.

"The dog! Where's the dog?" clamored Bilge swimming with long expert strokes.

"I got him," yelled Spud. "The darn little hedgehog! He's just about scratching the hide off me."

"Hold on to him!" bawled Bilge. "Don't let him get carried away. He's so dog-goned little we couldn't never see him again."

As this conversation was shouted from wave crest to wave crest the eight huskies in the water were swimming from one piece of wreckage to another, strategically abandoning smaller pieces for larger ones, till presently they were all lined up with hands or arm holds on a spar.

The *Judson*, meantime, having exchanged shots with a submarine which had dived, and thereafter sprinkled the waters round with depth charges, but with no obvious result, came charging back to pick up her boat before going in further pursuit, when a cry from the crow's-nest tube created renewed excitement on the bridge and caused an instant leveling and concentration of glasses on a spot dead ahead in the sea.

"Whale!" declared one.

"Torpedo!" suspected another.

"Blackfish!" insisted a third.

"Wake of some kind, all right!" decided Captain Bill, who after many disappointments forced himself to be conservative.

All at once the wake disappeared. Where a few minutes before there had been leaps, splashes and an odd commotion in the water there was now nothing at all. While the *Judson* drove steadily forward the bridge contemplated the phenomenon



in wonder; but the bridge of a destroyer becomes blasé.

It has experienced so many alarms and eager anticipations in these eighteen months; it has pursued so many bobbing tin cans or nodding champagne bottles that it thought were periscopes; it has glued its eyes so many times to drifting spars or bits of wreckage that it took for broaching submarines; it has piped its crew to general quarters so frequently to face what looked like an enemy and turned out to be some inert bit of flotsam — that it is prepared for anticlimaxes. It has even stood with trembling knees and a feeling of helplessness when a broaching torpedo came sizzling and frothing toward it, only to have the engine of death dive under the bow and pursue its onward care-free way like a playful porpoise it really was.

Hence now it was only with a sort of empty feeling of recurrent boredom that its various watchers — captains, executives, lieutenants, ensigns, quartermasters, yeomen, bunting tossers and lookouts — experienced this sudden relaxation of tautened nerves and gazed lassitudinously at the phenomenon of an ordinary sloppy sea where a moment before had been turmoil and the flash of the unusual.

"Hell's bells!" ejaculated the captain suddenly.

"Where's our boat?"

"Gone, sir!" echoed several amazed voices, as its absence was suddenly recognized.

"Row of heads clinging to a spar, like turtles on a log," reported Lieutenant Cherry, whose battle station was with the lookout in the crow's-nest.

"Count 'em!" called up the captain anxiously.

"Eight!"

"Thank God!" grumbled the captain. "That includes the red-headed nut that went over after the pup. Have they got the pup too?" he inquired dryly.

"Yes, sir," reported Cherry with a laugh. "He's running up and down on the spar."

"All is not lost, then," remarked the captain, with a sarcastic sneer at his own fortunes. "We have missed the sub and lost a boat, but we have rescued one spotted pup from the watery deep. What would have happened to the boat, though?" he suddenly demanded.

"What would?" inquired the exec., completely mystified.

Ordering his helm to port and slowing up to put the second lifeboat down Captain Bill passed to windward of the men upon the spar, some of whom had now straddled it perilously and were employing both hands to wigwag the story of their misadventure to the signal man upon the bridge as well as to anxious and inquiring friends who strung themselves out along the deck, in whatever positions they could find that were inconspicuous from the bridge and easily visible to their comrades in the water.

"He says a sub rammed them and sunk their boat!" reported the signal man to the captain as he gathered the first intelligible sentence from all this eccentric waving of arms.

"A submarine!" ejaculated Captain Bill unbelievably. "Can it be that the other one was lying round up here?"

"Piece of wreckage about four hundred yards to starboard behaving very strangely, sir," reported

Cherry from the crow's-nest. "Seems to be moving in opposite direction from other drift, with some sort of commotion in water."

"It might be the sub. Maybe it's fouled something," speculated the captain excitedly, and with his own eager hand snatched the wheel and gave it a spin to port.

"They say they tied a hatch cover to the submarine, sir," drawled the signal man imperturbably, his face still bent toward the enthusiastic gesticulations on the spar. "They say it went to starboard, and you follow the wake."

"Tied a hatch cover to it? How in blazes!" and Captain Bill broke into shouts of laughter. "Hell's bells! There are just two men on earth who could have done that stunt, and they are Ford and Kennedy."

The rescue boat was quickly launched, and the *Judson*, swinging again, was soon where, from a spot as low as the bridge and at a distance of one hundred yards, the oddly behaving hatch cover was plainly visible, now moveless in the water, now bobbing slightly like the cork on a line in the old fishing hole back home when you get a healthy but tentative nibble.

"That's him all right," gloated Captain Bill gleefully. "He's gone down as low as he can stand and is nosing along looking for bottom to lie on. I'll bet he don't know we've got a tag on him. What do you think of that, hey?"

And the jubilant Captain Bill turned to note that the boat had reached the spar and picked up its load.

"Get those men on board quick," he ordered,

196      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

"so I can drop a can. There's no time to lose. The line might part."

"What's this about tying a teakettle to a U-boat's tail?" Kirk demanded shortly as the boat came up the falls.

"Kennedy done it, sir," reported Ma modestly.

"The captain wants you on the bridge, Kennedy," the executive announced; and Bilge, considerably agitated, dashed for the bridge.

"Here! Here! Put down that pup!" shouted Kirk.

But it was too late. Bilge was rushing up the ladder.

"Still a-huggin' that wet pup! You never can tell what a plain ordinary gob will do, kin you?" remarked Ma, though more in admiration than in censure.

And Kirk, thoroughly exasperated, admitted that you can't.

"What's this about the submarine?" demanded the captain.

Bilge jerked out his story in one breathless sentence.

"How much line did you say?"

"Three hundred feet, I guess, sir," reported Bilge.

"Maybe more; maybe not so much."

"Set the depth charges for one hundred and fifty feet," directed the captain.

An ensign hurried aft to execute the order.

"Permission to keep the dog, sir?" inquired Bilge respectfully, appealingly. "He's a game little tike, sir."

The shivering pup, nestling close for warmth against the wet bosom of Kennedy, which could

hardly have yielded much, looked up inquiringly into the captain's eyes, and after a moment's scrutiny put forth an approving paw as recognizing that like himself this man belonged to the blood royal of a fighting line. That paw swayed the wavering captain, who was naturally in a mood to grant Kennedy most anything.

"Yes," he said; "but I didn't know you were going to jump overboard after him."

"There wasn't time to think, sir," apologized Bilge. "He was going by fast, and he was a game little devil, so I just jumped in and got him."

"Same way about tying a can to the submarine, I suppose," said the captain, unsmiling but with a humorous twinkle in his eye. "No time to think and so you just tied a tag on him and let it go at that."

"We're out to beat the Hun," grinned Bilge. "I just figured if we could hang a buoy on him you'd do the rest, sir."

"I will, Kennedy!" said the captain grimly. "I congratulate you. It's fellows like you that make the war absolutely hopeless for Germany. Here, stand by and see the show. Fact is, we'll let you drop the can."

The bridge looked at Bilge curiously, in his soaking nether garments, but to their curiosity added smiles and admiration. The captain had motioned Bilge to the small hand pump, the piston of which was filled with glycerin and water. The lifting of the handle would release a depth charge far in the rear.

Getting up the speed necessary for the safe firing of depth charges, the co of the *Juason* was set

to cross the bow of the slow-moving hatch cover at a distance of fifty yards.

"Let go!" the captain ordered as they cut the angle at the spot his judgment had computed, and Bilge pulled the piston.

For a few seconds there was silence on both bridges and along the deck, and every eye turned back on a spot in the wake at which, when two hundred yards astern, the solid sheet of the ocean seemed to crack with a sound like smothered thunder, and bridge and deck pulsed sharply under the feet of captain and crew.

Swinging, Captain Bill tried to sight the moving hatch cover again with intent to repeat his maneuver but at first could not discern it; and when he did it was no longer moving but floated innocuously. While they circled it the surface of the water changed from blue to dirty gray and mottled brown, with specks in it and streaks and swimming shreds of things.

"There's a piece of the oar," exclaimed Bilge as they passed through this dirty gray, which is the color that oozing oil makes upon the waters. "You must have dropped it right on him, captain."

They came back over the spot once more, and this time the dirty gray patch was much larger, with air bubbles discernible, and bits of floating fabric, some horseshoe life preservers, what looked like part of a mattress and several pieces of wooden gratings. Again the second whaleboat went down the davits and took samples of all this scrambled mess. Among other things they gathered scraps of a newspaper printed in German and various bits of flotsam that suggested Teutonic origin.

"Blew her wide open," declared Kirk.

"Looks like it," admitted Captain Bill solemnly.

Bilge by now was down on the deck, where, having beguiled the cook into producing and heating some condensed milk, he was feeding it to the pup from his own mess plate.

"That's getting 'em!" said Ma as he lounged up, still soaking and too excited with the deeds of the moment to think yet about donning dry garments.

"That's getting 'em!" And he reported what the boat was gathering in.

"That's fighting 'em with our hands and our feet," Bilge laughed, recalling his poetic effusion of years and years ago in the night before.

"And a bomb in their innard parts," chuckled Ma. "Anyhow I feel better about that baby's cap in the boat now."

"Me too," said Bilge; and for a moment the two friends were grave, but wore a satisfied air.

Next day as the *Judson* lay in port the carpenter's mate was painting a star on the forward stack.

"I put her there," said Bilge, gazing at it proudly.

"You did, durn you, with some mighty good assistance from me," grunted Ma. "Not to mention Captain Bill."

And they both looked respectfully toward the bridge, which, though empty now, was still the symbol of his presence.

## FOR TWO ORPHANS

FOURTH OF JULY was coming in Ireland, and there were to be doings in the old flotilla with a military pageant on the beach at night and field sports in the afternoon on Lallyskallen between contending teams from each of the mother-ships and from the barracks, with perhaps a team made up from the destroyer forces. The Admiral sent down a signal to the fleet:

Officers and men belonging to ships in the harbor who wish to take their personal friends to sports at Lallyskallen may do so.

"Does it say lady friends?" inquired Bilge, anxiously.

"Can a lady be a friend — these yere Irish ladies?" intervened Ma, ironically. "She's either yore sweetheart or yore mortal nemesis — that's how I dope 'em."

"It doesn't mention the sex. If you call them your personal friends," ruled Yeoman Leslie, "they're invited."

Leslie was feeding cigarette papers to Engineman Bate's little brown goat, which was a lovable, pampered creature and cared about such delicacies.

"Gee!" gasped Jew Dycknan, he of the stiff, luxuriant black pompadour which so irritated a certain executive officer of a certain mother-ship that whenever he caught sight of it, he was wont to order Jew to the barber. "Gee!" gasped Jew, as



he scrutinized the mimeographed program of contests for the day. "There's a prize of fifty pounds to the team that wins the most points."

Bilge and Ma gazed over Jew's shoulder, also scanning the list of events, and neither failing to note and confirm the matter of the fifty pounds, though they strategically refrained from commenting thereupon in Dyckman's presence, for each had the same thought at the same moment. Eventually Bilge plucked the sleeve of Ma, and the two retired for conference to a secluded angle of the deck of the *Judson*, an angle screened ahead by the forward smokestack, and to windward by deck housings.

"We ought to have that fifty," suggested Bilge tentatively.

"We ort," admitted Ma tersely. "We-all are a-goin' to need it. Do you allow —" and the plain, likable face of the old-young Texan assumed one of those peculiarly feminine expressions of mingled wistfulness and apprehension which had earned for him his ridiculous maternal sobriquet — "Do you allow 'at we could somehow another git up a team and win it, and leave them take the medals and us take the money?"

For a moment the red-headed, freckled, large-mouthed, amiable and incurably optimistic Bilge weighed the selfishness of mankind carefully in his eager eye.

"No!" he decided with emphasis. "The only way would be for I and you to go out and win it ourself — win more points between us —"

"I ain't got no time for crazy man's talk," rebuked Ma disappointedly.

"And at that we'd be lucky if they didn't organ-

ize to take it away from us," concluded Bilge, having ignored the outburst of Ma's ill-tempered pessimism.

"Shucks! Nothin' that we-all try ever comes to nothin' nohow," peevish Ma. "We been savin' and savin', and we never do get enough. All I'll have left on pay day is seventeen pounds, and I reckon you'll have 'bout four. What the Hades is twenty-one pounds in —"

But speculation had been gleaming bright in the clear blue eye of Bilge. It was an audacious, an impossible project that had occurred to his reckless mind; then more the idea tantalized and fascinated him.

"We might get away with it at that," he interrupted enthusiastically. "I ain't so sure now that we couldn't."

"Couldn't what?" demanded Ma gloomily.

"Win it ourselves — just I and you," proposed Bilge coolly.

"Plumb bug-house, ain't you?" inquired Ma disrespectfully.

But the rash ardor of Bilge would not be dampened by disrespect, and he went on cunningly to plant an irresistible suggestion in the mind of his shipmate by remarking:

"Phyllis would be there — don't you think? Phyllis and Mona?"

Ma, though he had made a cynical remark about the ladies a few minutes before, started noticeably. Bilge was getting a crush on Phyllis of late, while Ma had, despite the happy termination of the affair, rather avoided the New York Bar since his encounter there with Mrs. O'Mahony. This, however, only

resulted in his discovery of Phyllis's sister Mona, who dispensed the cheering smile and the foaming beaker over at the Baltimore Buffet. Mona was possibly less attractive physically than Phyllis, but she was none the less pretty, and she had a sort of deliciously intimate way with her that was peculiarly warming and expansive to the budding tendrils of regard for womankind that just now were putting forth in the shy Texan's heart.

And since when was admiration not the mightiest quickener of woman's love? Did not chivalrous knighthood, which lifted wooing from an impulse to an art, always delight to display its courage and its prowess before its lady fair? And did not Ma hail from that sunny region beyond the southern Mississippi where most men are brave and all aspire to be considered chivalrous?

These things were so in very truth, and they made it exceeding clever strategy on the part of Bilge to suggest that Phyllis and Mona would be present at the field sports on Lallyskallen to stir the athletes to their best and witness the triumph of the better men. The changing of expression on Ma's face was so swift it was ludicrous. The dark eyes roved restlessly and began to kindle; the gloom upon his features became transparent and then was banished by a brilliant smile.

"Dog-gone you, Bilge!" he said, and thereby tokened his surrender to a darling prospect.

It was in consequence of this little chat that every day thereafter, when the *Judson* was in port and liberty time arrived for Ma and Bilge, instead of going on the beach with the crowd, they took boat to Lallyskallen and worked out their ship-cramped

running and jumping muscles on the country roads and over the long sweep of the green turf-sheathed hills beyond the golf course. In a secluded spot they mapped out roughly a course for the hundred-yard dash, and then a flattened circle that might rudely correspond to the two-twenty and serve also for the four-forty and the mile runs; and with a stop-watch borrowed from Ordnance Officer Mc-Master, who was always splitting seconds, they timed themselves carefully.

"I shore do hate to work this hard," wheezed Ma one afternoon as he breasted the tape at the end of the four-hundred-and-forty-yard run and went rolling and sprawling on the long grass under a beech tree. "It's agin any Texas-born nature to use his legs this-away while there's a hoss on earth."

"You don't know any other way to get fifty pounds, do you, Ma?" inquired Bilge with searching irony.

"I shore don't," admitted Ma, searching for a shamrock.

"And we've got to have it."

"Right agin, partner. Only it's this yere team business — not even the *Judson* crew to pick from, but you and me against eight hundred men on one mother-ship and seven hundred and ninety-two men on another, and against the barracks team, and the flotilla team, and like as not a limey team into the bargain — it's depressin', that's all. Howsomer — go to it!" And Ma cheered up a trifle while he held the stop-watch and Bilge went out and came charging down over the hundred-yard course.

"Eleven seconds and a quarter. That ain't so bad. Bilge, durn me if I don't think you can win"

that there dash — with a week or two more's training."

"'Course I can win it," panted Bilge.

"At that," reflected Ma, "it looks like we-all are just two plumb nuts to figure 'at us two men can beat out two navies —"

"Nuts nothing!" argued Bilge stoutly. "There's ten events and the winner counts five, the place three, and the third one in each; and we've got an honest chance to win every one of 'em except the shot-put and the tug-of-war. I'm no shot-putter, and you're too light. The two of us couldn't win a tug-of-war against a bunch of limeys even."

"Not unless we hooked on the *Judson's* turbines somewhere behind us," concurred Ma; "but the main point is, Bilge, we're going to be plumb wore out. You kin win some of these dashes, yes. So kin I, and take the mile mebbe; or if we wasn't in nothing else, you might win the jumps and I could grab off the potato race, and the two of us might get by with that there three-legged farce; but takin' 'em one after the other, pardner, I tell you we're goin' to be plumb wore out."

"Not if we work it right, we're not," retorted Bilge stubbornly. "We've just got to start out naturally not to be a hog. Here's how we do it," he proceeded to explain hopefully. "The hundred-yard dash comes first. I run it and I win it. That's five points to start with. The two-twenty comes next. While I'm laying flat on my bosom, resting, you run in that and you get at least a place."

"More'n likely I win it, and you get nothin' but a place in that first race," amended Ma, peeved at not being conceded first position unquestioningly.

Bilge looked displeased.

"Ma," he pleaded, with the air of patience tried almost too much. "Can't you be modest? Can't you forget that Texas-bred egotism of yours for a moment, and let's dope this thing out right. Anyway — supposing one of us wins one of those races, that's five points; and if the other gets second in his race, that's three more. Then comes the running broad jump. I'll be fresh enough to tackle that then, while you're resting, and let's say I don't get nothing but a three in that. That's eleven points in the first three events. Then we can afford to lose the four-forty or the mile."

"Lose 'em?" protested Ma. "I kin win the mile all right; that ex-professional guy on the *Sunflower* might beat me in the four-forty, but there ain't no power on earth can take the mile away from me, less'n it's a hoss."

Bilge contemplated for a moment the determined countenance of his friend and then proposed craftily. "Tell you what, Ma! If you're uncertain about the four-forty, lay out of it altogether and rest yourself. Then you can take the mile, sure. That's five points more."

"Sixteen altogether, ain't it?" inquired Ma, who appeared to regard Bilge's last suggestion as a happy one.

"By that time, I'm rested," went on the machinist's mate, "and can take the high jump easy. That's twenty-one."

Hope kindled in Ma's eyes like sunset on a windowpane.

"Twenty-one'll just about win the fifty pounds, I allow," with a lump of exultant, anticipatory joy-

embarrassing speech; "because these here different teams have got some pretty good men. They're liable to split the figures up between 'em and be pilin' up fifteen or sixteen points apiece, while there's less than a hundred altogether, so if we get to twenty-one points, with all these other events yet to come, we're bound to pile up five or six more, and that'll shore win for us. You talked me over, Bilge, I admit. I'm not never a-going to doubt again."

"This Fourth of July celebration was sure a god-send to us," commented Bilge, so warmed by happy thrills that he rather overlooked the fact that the entire affair was still in the future.

"It sure was," agreed Ma. "And now, if you ain't winded yourself complete by talkin' about how you was goin' to win these two jumps, you better fish that tape out of your pocket, and I'll measure off the landscape and see what your flyin' radius is to-day."

Bilge, recalled to present duty, lifted himself tenderly from the sod, began to stretch his legs and arms and back muscles by way of getting himself limbered up and to prance slowly down to the take-off and back again.

"Sixteen-feet-four," reported Ma, after the third trial. "You certainly got to raise your trajectory some if you're goin' to make our little party a happy one on Independence Day. There's a gob in one of these 'white lily' bunches that can jump seventeen feet any time without much tryin'."

The men on the mother-ships who never go to sea, but work all day and often all night in the grease and grime of machine-shop and foundry

until they look like black men, are facetiously dubbed "white lilies" by their companions of the sea-wasps.

"I've got another jump in me now; I'll try again," proposed Bilge.

"No, don't you!" admonished Ma. "You strained enough for to-day on the long jump. Put the watch on me while I tackle the two-twenty, and then you can have a hop at the high ones."

So the two inseparables plotted and prepared for some weeks in the month of June.

The Fourth of July, nineteen hundred and eighteen, was a beautiful day in Ireland. The sun was pleasantly warm, the breeze was affectionately gentle; no rain fell, but fleecy clouds feathered the green, hill-crowned horizon or, singly or *en masse*, frescoed the cerulean blue with sailing vapor-ships of snowy whiteness. For the first time in an entire year of occupancy, Sundays also considered, the flotilla declared something like a holiday. To be sure, destroyers came and went to sea. Deep in the bowels of the mother-ships, forges glowed and foundries smoked and smelled and transformed molten streams to shapes of brass or steel; lathes still turned and hammers rose and fell on mandril and rivet-head; but the working parties were reduced as low as possible.

All morning a launch patrolled the harbor, with strains from the band it carried wafting over the waters, and a huge banner stretched fore and aft called attention to the field sports and American Independence Day entertainment provided on Lallyskallen. All morning, too, crews in the mess kitchens of the mother-ships labored at freezing



giant casks of ice cream, at the making of cakes and pies, and at the compounding of mountains of sandwiches, while other working parties extracted quantities of soft drinks from the storerooms and transported them to places of absorption on the Island; for this was to be a Fourth of July that as nearly as possible approximated the home order.

Only one thing lacked — noise. Not a salute was fired. Not an ounce of powder was burned. Not a firecracker popped or a toy torpedo cracked. It made the man with a memory reflect. Back in the days of placid peace a Fourth was not a Fourth that was not noisy. The town so small and poor it did not burn fireworks or touch off cannon-anvils or have a bonfire, in connection with which prominent citizens stood up to make speeches — the town that didn't do these things wasn't really a town; it was only a crossroads.

Now, with the greatest military conflagration in history going on, these men of the destroyer fleets who for a year had spent every working day upon a potential battle line, and who in the month behind them had delivered a quarter of a million battling sons of liberty to the great powder holocaust in France, — these men celebrated Independence Day with no louder fulminations than the crack of the merry base hit or the smacking of lips over ice cream when ice cream has not before been tasted since the mother country was left behind.

Toward noon the bay was gay and busy with the cut and dash of hurrying speed-boats bearing officers and their guests, and with the huge plodding motor-sailers carrying the enlisted men to the field of action, while old side-wheeler or "paddle-boats,"

as they call them over here, were wheezing up to the docks and blowing whistles and making ready to take off the local population in considerable numbers, for the shopkeepers and publicans ashore had discerned the significance of the day to the best customers that had ever leaned upon their counters. Abandoning their own customary half-holiday on Wednesday they had closed for all day Thursday to give themselves and their employees opportunity to observe their American cousins at the audacious business of celebrating on Britannia's soil the day that made her American colonies no longer hers.

And the British naval and military forces, with good-humored complaisance, were assisting. Lallyskallen was a British Admiralty possession. A British Admiral had crashed out on his radio the signal for the celebration. On a scrap of rock in the center of the bay, the white ensign of the British navy and a beautiful silken banner marked with the stars and stripes kissed the breeze from the same staff and held each other so close that the two devices seemed to run together and say the same thing to all the world.

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! echoed the hundreds of feet along Black Prince pier, as the passengers landed from the boats and made their way inward to the high, verdant crown of Lallyskallen and back to the flat beyond the hill where the games were to be staged. It was no cinder-path affair. The tracks were fine old Irish turf a bit lumpy but—tracks; and marked out by hundreds of little pine stakes, and these stakes were tied at the top with red and white and blue ribbons, so that they gave at once a U. S. A. appearance to the mead. Indeed,

at a distance and backgrounded against the green sod, they suggested that some Burbank had been producing American-hued daisies among the Irish buttercups and clover.

All was done in order. The Flotilla Commander was Judge of the Course, a duty which he appeared to regard as purely honorary. The judges of contest, the measurers, the announcer and the starter were junior officers. Each wore the glove-fitting fatigue uniform of a commissioned man in the United States Navy, and they moved about the scene with a snappy stride and the preoccupied air of men whose duties were grave. They were supported, chaperoned, and advised on all obscure issues by a young giant wearing the uniform of a lieutenant, who oversaw all but modestly refrained from accepting official designation on the program. He was a famous college athlete who had hurled the discus, put the shot, and tossed the hammer, excelled at boxing, wrestling and high jumping, and won track and field events galore. His very name steadied the contenders and lent dignity to the proceedings.

And the senior officers of the fleet contributed their gold-braided presence grandly to this picturesque occasion, a few rare captains strolling with dignity or standing slightly apart with that rigidity of pose and distinction of manner which is the fitting demeanor of a four-striper on public exhibition. Commanders, too, and lieutenant-commanders were there, — younger, lither, with the light of youth still burning in their eyes, striding the turf like the king of this world which a destroyer-captain feels himself to be. And if one of these three-

stripers had chanced to gather in from among the fine homes along the heights an Irish or an English lady guest or two, he felt at least like two kings and his attendance on the ladies showed how well rounded is the training at Annapolis which equips a young man — with the added experience of actual practice — not only to take his chameleon-hued little ship over trackless seas to sure contact with his comrade and to furnish it with safe escort from a resourceful enemy, but equips him also to act as escort to one of these gayly costumed dames of the British gentry, or mayhap some isolated American lady who is treated as if she too were nobility.

There were British officers also, army and navy — the naval men in the blue, double-breasted coats of their uniform with the straight gold rank stripes upon their arm that indicated the men of the line and the wavy gold ones that proclaimed the men of the reserve; and the men of the army in their khaki and Sam Brownes, with frequently a wound-chevron upon the sleeve. They were hard-bitten, competent appearing men, all of them, and they looked with courteous interest at the preparations for the field sports, a thing in which their knowledge was expert but turned occasionally with a mystified air at all the hubbub, the cracking of bats on balls, the thudding of mits, and the yawping of rooters that emanated from the baseball diamonds where four teams were contending with each other for the honor of a final play-off as the climax to the day.

Our British and our Irish cousins gave evidence of trying hard to enjoy the game, but all seemed to end with studying in a politely baffled way the

incomprehensible excitements of the American onlookers.

"Brutal! Bally brutal, don't ye know," decided one of them. "Fawncy bowling at the beggar's head that way. Why don't they let him wear the mawsk instead of the chap with the pad, if they're jolly well trying to bash his bally bean every time he comes up to the wicket." After three innings of determined concentration, he had reached the conclusion that the root idea of the great American game was for the pitcher to knock the batter senseless before he could hit the ball.

Ma and Bilge, however, concerned themselves with none of these issues. Two men cannot make a baseball team, even when the pitcher is Ma and the catcher is Bilge. Besides, the results upon the diamond were not totaled among the points in the field contest.

"En-tre-e-e-s for the hundred-yard dash!" megaphoned the announcer, and the entries were duly recorded; Higgins for the *Sunflower*, one of the mother-ships; Sully for the *Primrose*, the other mother-ship; Ellis for the barracks, and Bilge Kennedy for —

"What team, Kennedy?" inquired the scorer.

"No team, — just Ma and I — Ford here," stammered Bilge, with a jerk of his head toward the boson's mate. "We've organized a team between ourselves to win this purse."

"Wha—what!" gasped the young ensign, barely repressing a smile.

"Yeh!" said Ma Ford, pressing up. "Kennedy and me are together."

A look of mystification grew on the scorer's face,

and he turned and glanced past the circle of judges gathered round him to the tall lieutenant behind.

"Enter him!" said the lieutenant with an indulgent smile, and a true athlete's respect for heart and nerve and ambition.

"What ship are you two men on?" inquired the scorer.

"The *Judson*."

The *Judson* was added to the list of competing teams, very much to the surprise of Captain William Bradshaw when he saw the name of his ship chalked high on the bulletin board; and indeed, it was significant of the kind of sea-duty destroyers are called upon to perform that of all the ships of that class which came and went from this port there was not even a flotilla team made up from the pick of all of them.

"No sufficient time to train," was the apology offered by a gunner's mate off the *McDonald*. "These 'white lilies' can get on the beach some times every day. Us destroyer men are out six days and in maybe two; and we've been so pulled all apart by the jerk and jump of riding these calico bronchos of ours through these combing British seas that we don't any more than get ourselves put together and our universal joints tightened up before it's time to try our luck outside again."

This explanation was perfectly sound too, only the necessities of Bilge and Ma had led them to dare and even to hope, in spite of such a handicap.

"Clear the course!" megaphoned the announcer and the crowd, which was large enough to represent the flotilla and the town quite respectably, but also small enough to preserve the delightful intimacy of

a village fête, obeyed. In consequence of this spirit of camaraderie among the crowd, the story of the absurd aspirations of Bilge and Ma could be whispered from lip to lip and chuckled over as the red-haired machinist's mate, in short running pants which he had made by the performance of a capital operation upon a pair of faded blue dungarees, faced the starter and drew for position with the others.

Ma, on his arm a bucket which contained a sponge, a towel, a bottle of water and some lemons, crowded close and communicated final injunctions to his team mate.

"Git away fast, Bilge!" he whispered hoarsely. "Run the legs plumb off these yer coots in the first fifty yards and then don't you stop runnin' neither. If you beat 'em bad enough, it'll get their nannies complete, and make it easier next time."

"Get set!" advised the young lieutenant with the automatic. The runners got set. Everybody else round that pegged-off space got set also. Even the bored-looking four-strippers and the gold-banded British rear-admirals felt the strange tensivity of the moment.

Crack! went the pistol, and thud, thud, the feet of flying runners.

True to Ma's instructions, Bilge was away as if shot from a gun, but half-way down the course he faltered and in the end was overhauled and finished third, the number of points scored for which position was one. The crowd applauded the victor and laughed good-naturedly at this inauspicious beginning for the aspiring pair of young men from the destroyer *Judson*.

"One p'int!" muttered Ma reproachfully, as he

met his defeated athlete with the bucket and towel. "One p'int don't start us off with nothin' muc particular."

"I stepped in a hole out there," apologized Bilge. "It near threw me down, and then I couldn't get my stride again. . . . Phyllis — did you make out Phyllis over there?"

"Phyllis!" frowned Ma, who had blanketed his team-mate with the towel and was walking him up and down to cool him out. "Phyllis, huh! Sure, that's what made you throw the race. I seen you lookin' round. By thunder, I knowed I did. You poor coot! You turned around in the middle of the race to see if your sweetheart was makin' you off proper, and — shucks! You make me plumb disgusted."

Ma fell back on silence and refused even to look at Bilge while he divested himself of his own surplus garments and made ready for the two-twenty. Meanwhile some chalk marks had gone up on the bulletin board so that it read: *Sunflower 5, Primrose 3, Judson 1*. Ma turned and glowered.

"It'll read different after I've run," he boasted to Bilge. Bilge, in humble mood, pinched, slapped and massaged the thin, wiry legs of Ma and did to him all those things that trainers and handlers are supposed to do to athletes in the endeavor to get them ready to expend their muscular energies most supremely when the decisive moment comes.

"I'm a-goin' to walk right through this bunch and throw the fear o' God into 'em," blurbed Ma. "I'm a-going to hoist my speed cones and run away from 'em for fair."

"You sure are, Ma," declared Bilge, devotedly



and contritely. "I feel so bad about me making that stumble, I could cry." The freckled, homely face was contorted into lines of still greater homeliness, and it did indeed look as if the pained blue eyes of the machinist's mate might be prepared to shed a tear.

"Well, it ain't no use to cry, buddy," soothed Ma. "I'll go out and git them points back now, and then you'll go on into the jumps and redeem yo'se'f."

"I did think I saw Phyllis over there, though," recalled Bilge and turned to scan the crowd again.

"Look yere, you Bilge!" warned Ma, with a direct and serious glance. "Our job's cut out for us to-day, and if we're a-goin' to win, we got to everlastin' forget about them girls and go to it."

"You're right, partner," agreed Bilge docilely. "I wish I could make sure, though," and again his eyes searched the crowd anxiously.

"The next race — two-hundred-and-twenty yards!" drawled the megaphone.

Now the two-twenty promised to be a gruelling affair. Notwithstanding his air of boastful self-confidence, Ma faced the starter with secret misgivings, having heard rumors of the fleetness of Davis, the *Sunflower* entry, and Rigg of the *Primrose*. The draw went against him too, for he got the outside. But there was nothing ailing in Ma's courage. He resolutely planned for himself, as he had planned for Bilge, to run the legs off his contestants in the first part of the race.

At the report of the pistol he was off like a two-year-old, and at the turn was leading and taking the inside from the *Primrose* man. This lead he held

handsomely in the back-stretch; but on the far turn something went wrong. Ma didn't stumble or fall down or cease his stride; but his swinging legs appeared to make no progress for him at all, and on after another the whole field passed him on the turn, so that he was rather surprised to find himself the last of a procession of laboring athletes when a had rounded into the straightaway. The sight of this flying column in front of him served to recall Ma to himself; his feet took hold upon the ground once more, in consequence of which he overtook two men but finished fourth in the race, and without therefore so much as one point to the credit of his team.

A fine scorn mantled the freckled features of Bilge as Ma trotted shamefacedly toward him, with the sun in his beaten eyes and the breath whistling through his parted teeth.

"I s-pose you got an alibi of some kind," Bilge remarked witheringly.

"I have," panted Ma. "I seen Mona down there at that far turn, hangin' on the arm of this white-headed highbrow yeoman from the *McDonald*, like pullin'-taffy on a hook. And it just about paralyzed me. For a few seconds I didn't know I was runnin' at all. I thought I had knocked that guy down and was just dancin' round there, kickin' the living daylights out of him."

"That was exactly what it looked like to me," commented Bilge dryly, "some kind of shadow-boxing. It sure wasn't running. Listen to that now!"

The megaphone was bawling out the result of the second race: *Barracks 5* — for a dark horse

from the Barracks team had won first position —  
*Primrose 3, Sunflower 1.*

The score on the Bulletin board now stood *Sunflower 6, Primrose 6, Barracks 5, Judson 1.*

"And it's my 1," reminded Bilge stingingly.

"It shore is," admitted Ma, with deep contrition in his tones.

"Ma," proposed Bilge, seizing his friend's hand imploringly, "we've got to forget about these Janes of ours, or we're skinned alive. Let's just put 'em out of our minds entirely."

"Yore dead right, mate," affirmed Ma, without reservation, "and I string right along with you on the proposition. I solemnly swear 'at I hereby renounce all thought of womankind from now on until the end of these yere events that we-all are a contendin' in."

"So help you, Uncle Sam!" affirmed Bilge solemnly, and stretched himself with something like content upon the turf while Ma began to perform an osteopath sonata in ten digits and sixteen movements upon his legs and spine with a view to getting Bilge ready for the broad jump which was introduced now to give the runners who might wish to contend in the four-hundred-and-forty yard race an opportunity to rest.

The course for the running broad jump was naturally much smaller than the oval of the track, and the crowd pressed thick about it. Bilge was jumping only fairly. The close proximity of so many careless eyes, the sense of his semi-nakedness in that skimpy undershirt and those abbreviated dungarees made him self-conscious, while the suspicion that his lank figure did not appear to bes: advantage

under these circumstances created in his proud heart a feeling of depression that hung upon his limbs like weights. There were misgivings that weakened too, — the fear that he and Ma had undertaken something so impossible that its failure would expose them to ridicule; and Bilge's fine young nature was peculiarly sensitive to ridicule, especially before Phyllis.

And Phyllis was there, right there in the crowd, pressed to the very edge of the course, with Chief Cook's Mate Stricklett as her escort, guide, and entertainer. Bilge did not like Stricklett. He had never suspected it before, but now he knew it — knew in fact that he hated him with a peculiar and venomous hate that could only be wiped out in blood. To think that Stricklett should be by when Phyllis was seeing him beaten!

Bilge ventured a glance at the fine oval of Phyllis's face. There was anxiety upon it. That hurt him again. He knew her loyal nature. He knew that when all this crowd was laughing at the absurd ambitions of himself and Ma, Phyllis had not laughed. She had believed. She must have even boasted, — and to Stricklett.

The *Sunflower* man jumped sixteen feet six, without much trying. Bilge jumped sixteen-eight by a supreme effort. The *Sunflower* man jumped sixteen-eleven. Bilge stole another look at Phyllis's face. She was plainly disappointed, but she hoped yet.

On the strength of this hope, Bilge jumped again, with every ounce of power that could be sent through his turbines. Sixteen-ten and one half was all that he could do. Half an inch short. A smirk

appeared on Stricklett's face. Just to show how easy jumping was to him, the *Sunflower* man jumped again, his last, and soared coolly seventeen feet two. Despair settled in Bilge's heart, for defeat here had a double significance. It meant not only the loss of the running broad jump, but it meant a conclusive demonstration of the absurdity of Ma's and Bilge's attempt to win the purse.

But Phyllis Ryan, bless her woman's loyal heart, stepped right out into the pathway where Bilge was turning back to get his little run down to the take-off. Phyllis never looked prettier or more attractive. She wore some kind of transparent hat that looked as if it might have been modeled from the wings of a butterfly. Her light, fluffy hair, her china-blue eyes, her smiling red lips, the sparkle of animation on her face with that extra flush which came with the little feeling of self-consciousness as she stepped out there before the crowd, — this made her prettier than ever.

And right in view of everybody she caught the hand of Bilge, drew his ear near to her wistful lips, and whispered something. It was nothing much she said, perhaps, but right in the very faces of this snickering throng, and in the moment of his prospective defeat, this sudden and bold alignment of feminine charm, of youth and beauty and brightness to his cause put a new heart in the breast of Bilge and new springs of steel into his legs. He bounded back up the line, took his start, ran lightly to the take-off and, exercising reserve, even in the moment of triumph, let his soaring heels descend into the soft earth only three or four inches beyond the best jump of the *Sunflower* man, whereas he

## 222 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

knew he could have jumped nineteen feet as easily as seventeen-five and one half.

A shout went up from the crowd, a shout followed by chuckling laughter and applause.

"Good owld red-top!" exclaimed an Irish marine, slapping Bilge excitedly on the back, with true Hibernian enthusiasm for the achievements of the under-dog.

"'E was nawthin' but plyin' wit t'other chap," opined a Tommy.

But it was a contingent from the *Judson* that broke out most vociferously. At first the *Judson* crew had felt itself compromised if not shamed at this insane freak of Bilge and Ma; yet the popularity of those two men, taken together with the loyalty of a ship's company for its own, which on these destroyers is greater even than the loyalty of college men for their *alma mater*, made them wish to encourage and applaud. But there had been no ground hitherto for encouragement, no occasion for applause; now, therefore, they lifted up their voices like wild men.

Bilge gave his first grateful glance to Phyllis, waved his hand to the Judsonites, and then turned to his team-mate and trainer.

"Dog-gone you, Bilge!" said Ma, in accents tender and admiring. "Dog-gone you!"

"Did you see me play with him?" inquired Bilge exultantly.

"I seen you," grinned Ma knowingly, "and I seen her! Now, the four-forty for me, and understand, this time, Bilge, I'm shore going to win it."

"Win it? We can't help but win it with these girls pulling for us the way they are."

"These girls?" iterated Ma pensively, and not without a touch of envy. "I haven't seen but one pulling for us yet, and that's yours."

"Well, Mona's pulling for you too, old man," assured Bilge, "and don't you doubt it."

"Wisht I could be plumb certain," confessed Ma longingly, as he extricated his leg muscles from under Bilge's pinching, massaging hands and pranced to and fro upon the turf by way of gingering up for the four-forty. In the course of these prancings he paused before the bulletin board and read the present score which totalled, after the running broad jump:

*Sunflower 9, Primrose 7, Barracks 5, Judson 6.*

"We're not such a bad fourth at that," remarked Bilge hopefully.

It was evident that the crowd had also noted that the position of the two-man team was not altogether hopeless; and they looked Bilge and Ma over with something like respectful interest as they came up together to draw.

"I ain't won a single point yet," confessed Ma hollowly.

"You've not started but once," comforted Bilge. "You're going to win this race, and then we'll be ahead. Guess these chaps round here won't begin to sit up and take notice then, what!"

"If I could only git one look at Mona's eyes," mooned Ma, "it would seem like I was going to have some luck after ail."

"Yonder — yonder she is," exclaimed Bilge excitedly. "She's shook that tow-headed yeoman, and Phyllis has shook Strickett. They're together, by cracky. Look! They're lookin' at you. Mona's

224      The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

smiling and nodding. She says for you to go to it Ma, and hand 'em the blooming rawsberry."

"I got her signal," chuckled Ma, as the sunshine of a smile entered his soul, and the magnetism in the glance of a pair of approving eyes galvanized him into consciousness of new physical powers. "Bilge what would this world be without woman?" he drooled.

"It wouldn't be a world; it would be a navy," retorted Bilge.

"And I would desert," affirmed Ma shamelessly. "Holy heck! Why don't they let me git off now while I got my storage batteries all full of that last smile."

"Take the lead just like I did, and hold it," directed Coach Bilge.

"Nope!" muttered Ma, with a stubborn shake of the head, doggedness being Ma's surviving quality. "Nope! I've got my strategy all doped out. I'm a-goin' to run second, just one yard behind the leader, it don't matter how fast or how slow he runs, and then on the back stretch of the second lap I'm goin' to hoist my speed cones and just naturally run the feet plumb off him, I don't care if he's one of these hydra-footed monsters the old Greeks used to enter in the Olympic games at Stockholm."

But that there were other strategists besides Ma in the race was presently made apparent. Something like collusion developed, as if it had been decided that this *Judson* team was dangerous and had to be killed off if the rest of them were to have a chance. This was complimentary but embarrassing. Instead of Ma running anybody's feet off, these contenders coolly set out to pull Ma's lung out of



him. One of them took the lead from the jump-off at a pace so tremendous that it extended the Texan to the utmost to keep that yard of distance he had stubbornly determined upon. When this leader was winded he dropped back only to be replaced by another, and eventually a third and a fourth, so that Ma was not only kept extended, but he was kept worried, and anxiety has defeated more athletes than muscular exhaustion.

Nevertheless the bozon's mate of the *Judson* tenaciously held to his position and still swung his thin legs forward one after another with clock-like rhythm, planting each foot with that air of decision which says so much ground gained, and stretching out eagerly for the next pendulum-like stride. In the end it was doggedness that won — doggedness and Mona — for the other runners had one by one shot their bolts in those successive challengings of Ma. Ma also might have faltered, but in a momentary lull of the general shouting a voice came to him, — the voice of Mona, calling loud and earnestly:

"Come on, Priestley! Come on, Priestley!"

Priestley was the lost given name of Ma. With it he had been christened at the fount, but no man on the *Judson* had ever heard it. In a moment of profound intimacy Ma, never rejoicing in the nickname with which his shipmates hailed him, had communicated the all but forgotten "Priestley" to Mona like a secret symbol; and she, sweet and tender heart, had resurrected it now from the limbo of a barmaid's memory of confidences, and hung it before the tired contender's mind like some heraldic banner of his ilk and lineage.

Ma's very heels responded. With a mighty final

leap he hurled his breast against the tape a hair's breadth before the *Barracks* man and fell exhausted into the arms of Bilge, with the plaudits of victory ringing in his ears.

After some fresh computations the bulletin board indicated: *Sunflower* 9, *Primrose* 8, *Barracks* 10, *Judson* 11.

"We lead by two," marveled Bilge, almost choking over the lump of happiness in his throat.

"*Judson* team l-e-e-a-d-i-i-n-g!" bawled the megaphone, as if fearful that the fact might escape the attention it deserved.

The crowd cheered approvingly but patronizingly, as still recognizing that this ridiculous two-man team had no chance to win. It was conceded, however, that its presence introduced an element of novelty into the contest, and all decided that it would be interesting to mark how far Bilge and Ma would go before crushed by the sheer weight of numbers. One distinct diversion in favor of the two was created as the men of the other destroyers, scenting the place where loyalty belonged, transferred their allegiances from one or other of the mother-ship teams to the sole representatives of the men who went to sea, and began to lift clamorous, concerted voices in behalf of their two audacious mates. It was about this time also that, from the *Judson* complement, a group of volunteer handlers and rubbers led by the Jew, Spud Murphy, Bull Bates, and Wart Kessler advanced to take possession of the tired athletes, so that neither need thereafter employ his scant remaining energies in acting as groom to the other. Indeed from this time forward the danger was that in the assiduity of these new knights

of the sponge and towel Bilge and Ma should suffer rather from too much handling than too little.

Now there can be no doubt that the expenditure of personal effort in behalf of any enterprise conduces to personal faith in that enterprise. Anyway this group had not been long engaged in kneading the flesh and titillating the nerves of Bilge and Ma before deciding that their two charges were no longer to be regarded as gallant contenders in behalf of a forlorn hope; but that they were in fact the most probable winners of the fifty pounds. So sure did they become of this that subsequent disposition of the fifty became a matter of immediate concern.

"What'll we do with it?" inquired Dyckman, as feeling the responsibility most keenly; for it was generally conceded that Jew had a distinct financial bent. He constituted himself the treasurer of all below-decks commercial activities. When money was to be collected, the Jew did it. When materials were to be purchased, for a "bust," a feed, or a riot of food and frolic ashore, Jew did it.

"Buy a lot of books for the ship's library," suggested Bull Bates, who was of a studious turn.

"The ship hasn't got a library," reminded Leslie the yeoman.

"The chief pettys have got a few books," recalled Jimmie Roser.

"Let's have a library — an enlisted man's library," seconded Bunny McIntyre who, with his speculative cast of mind, honestly desired at times to read something of the sort never inserted between the gaudy covers of a magazine.

"Rot!" protested Dutch Domberg, who possibly

could not read. "Let's buy a mountain of grape juice and give ourselves up to pleasure."

"Know what the regiments are doing in France," inquired Jew, bursting with suppressed eagerness through feeling the tickling urge of one great idea tugging like a captive balloon at the guy-ropes of self-restraint.

"What are they doing, Jew?" demanded Spud Murphy, knowing the pains of self-restraint and Dyckman and willing to be merciful.

"They're adopting these here little French companies," expatiated Jew, with a fine mingling of pathos and eloquence in his tones. "You can support one of 'em a whole year for two and three pounds. Companies in our army over there are adopting five or six. With fifty pounds the *Judsons* could be *parrain* to a dozen."

"'Tain't a bad idea, Jew, at that," conceded Bud.

"Let's make it girls, every one of 'em," proposed Spud, who was notoriously soft on the sex.

"Couldn't we take on about three boys out of the twelve," put in Jimmie, who was always raving about some little brothers at home.

So they debated while they hammered, pinched and pounded, and it is just possible that Ma, as they rolled him vigorously over, yawned and exchanged a wink with Bilge; but one could not be sure upon this point, for at the precise moment the megaphone lifted its sonorous wail to announce the high jump.

Bilge Kennedy went coolly out and won the high jump, with a *Barracks* man second, and a *Primrose* man third, which left the total score to read: *Sunflower* 9, *Primrose* 9, *Barracks* 11, *Judson* 16.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the Independence Day celebrant.

brators, and broke into real whole-hearted cheering for Bilge and Ma, with jibes and sallies and jeers for the other teams.

"Come yere, Bilge, and let me kiss you!" beamed Ma happily. "Gittin' kind of fed up with us, I reckon, what!"

"Yeh!" grinned Bilge, for beside thrilling over the joys of victory, he had identified an excited little squeal of ecstasy from Phyllis that was more than triumph to him.

But when Ma answered the call of the starter for the mile race his muscles refused to respond. The spring had not yet come back into his knees after the exertion of that grim half-mile. Bilge, who read the features of his friend as if they had been the pages of a newspaper, saw the expression of dismay and the involuntary headshake of misgivings on his tough old partner's face before Ma had confessed a word.

"We're away ahead of 'em now," he suggested soothingly. "Lay out on this race, Ma, the way we planned to lay out on the four-forty."

"But the shot-put and the tug-of-war comes next," agonized Ma. "We're not in neither of 'em, and if I lay out of the mile, —"

"Why, we'll just go out and clean 'em up like we started," boasted Bilge, with confidence undeflated. "If you're not right you'll get beat anyway, and be all worn out so you can't do any good in the spud race or the three-legged, and we've got to win both of them. Lay out on this one, Ma, I tell you."

"I guess I got to," admitted Ma regretfully, and yielded himself again to the soft green turf and the hands of the rubbers, some of whom, at this evidence

of excessive leg-weariness on the part of the boson's mate, began to look gloomy again as to the prospects of the team. This gloom deepened as three events were now reeled off without a point being scored for Bilge and Ma. A *Sunflower* man won the mile, with *Primrose* second and *Barracks* third, so that the totaled score was: *Sunflower* 14, *Primrose* 12, *Barracks* 12, *Judson* 16.

The *Judson* team still led, but the hammer throw wiped out this lead; only mercifully *Barracks* and not *Sunflower* won first, with *Primrose* second, and *Sunflower* third, making the figures on the score board:

*Sunflower* 15, *Primrose* 15, *Barracks* 17, *Judson* 16.

Thus in two events *Barracks* had moved from last place to first, with *Judson* second and the other two teams tied.

"I'd ought to have run that mile," lamented Ma. "I could a got second anyway, and now if *Barracks* wins the tug-of-war, they're so far ahead we cain't catch 'em in two more spasms, and that's all that's left."

"They won't win it," maintained Bilge stubbornly; and he was right, for *Primrose* won the tugs, *Sunflower* second and *Barracks* third. This left the team standing:

*Sunflower* 18, *Primrose* 20, *Barracks* 18, and *Judson*, as before, 16.

The most comforting feature of the situation now was that the tugs-of-war had taken a long time to pull off, and both Bilge and Ma were as fresh as the breeze from the sea.

"And now, thank God," said the machinist's mate

reverently, "we can both jump into that potato race, and I'll take the first and you can take the second. That'll give us eight points and put us away out on the horizon. What we'll pick up in the three-legged will cinch it for us."

But it appears that in a potato race the laurel is not so much to the strong as to the spry. The winner was an overlooked contestant from the barracks, James Joseph Mahan by name, a midget in size and a jockey by pre-naval occupation. Jock Mahan had no more surplus meat on his bones than a spider, and he danced so easily and swiftly back and forth between his galvanized iron bucket and his line of spuds upon the greensward that his victory was dazzling. The dogged Ma, however, managed to come in second with three points, while the toggled Bilge did well to get third; but he had added one more point to three, making four, and four added to the previous sixteen made twenty. The *Barracks*, however, with a gain of five, had pushed into first place again with 23, *Primrose* and *Sunflower* still retaining their former 20 and 18, respectively.

Bilge was profoundly discouraged.

"Second place in the three-legged will win for the *Barracks*," he groaned. "We got to make first or we lose," and the machinist's mate shook the shock of red hair from his dejected eyes, and with another glance at the score board discerned something else. "Yes; and if *Primrose* gets first they win, or if *Sunflower* gets it they tie with *Barracks* and we are out of it again. Ain't it fierce, though, for us all to come scrabblin' down to the wire together like this?" Bilge, panting on the sward,

kicked up his heels disconsolately, barely missing rubber Murphy's nose.

"The three-legged race is libble to be comedy though," reflected Ma who, having come in second in the potato race, was in better spirits naturally. "Maybe it didn't never occur to these yere other teams to git off in a field by their lonesome selves and practice this three-legged running the way we-al have."

"Maybe not," conceded Bilge, with a very dim light of hope beginning to kindle in his blue eye.

"Don't fail to count now, one-two, one-two, so we keep steppin' it off together," muttered Ma, as he substituted having his right leg bound to the left leg of Bilge so that the two respective feet must be planted as one.

"I'll count all right," whispered Bilge. "I bet that's a piece of tactics that hasn't occurred to any of these other gobs at all." And he looked round with a certain sense of superiority on the comic scene where right legs and left were being effectively harnessed together by a group of perspiring C.P.O.'s, impressed by the judges for that purpose.

"And don't you forget that naturally you step about six inches longer'n what I do," admonished Ma.

The interest of the thronged onlookers was now intense. They had not failed to notice the peculiar balance in the scores. It knew that three of the contending teams had it in their power to win the contest with this race, while even the fourth could tie it. The adherents of the respective teams knew this also. They split the air with cheers and cries with jibes and challenges, while the leg-bound ath-



letes had their ears bombarded with advice and suggestions flung at them by trainers and coaches, official and unofficial.

Yet clearly as the contestants had been made to understand the serious import of this final event, the farcical element in the situation excited their risibilities. All were unsteadied by ripples and gurgles of mirth, — all except Ma and Bilge. The *Barracks* team was nearly helpless from laughter, tall Jim Hance alleging that his side partner, little Billy Nelson, was tickling him.

"Go!" shouted the starter, who had used up all his blank cartridges.

The crowd also shouted, "Go," and the braces of runners leaped forward, some of them to totter into immediate disaster, others dashing forward at surprising speed but moving on uncertain tangents as muscles trained to obey two different wills wrestled with each other, and the stronger swung the weaker on a course to starboard or to port, with consequent zig-zagging effects all over the track.

But down through this absurd field of struggling, laughing, charging athletes, counting loudly and obviously, "One-two! One-two! One-two!" to synchronize their stride, came the lumbering Bilge and Ma. They moved more slowly than some of the racers, yet more methodically and effectively than any. In the first forty yards they had distanced all competitors save one team. In the next twenty yards they were passing this team.

"Come on, *Judson!*" bawled the crowd hoarsely.

"Come on, *Priestley!*" shrilled the encouraging voice of Mona.

"Come on, *Addison!*" squealed Phyllis excitedly,

## 234 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

and thus was Bilge's own flossy prenomens given abruptly to an unsuspecting world quite as recklessly as Ma's had been.

Under the impetus of an appeal like that both men quickened stride, and perhaps Ma forgot to count. Anyway, it was afterwards admitted that Bilge forgot to limit his stride and swung that long, seven-leagued leg of his forward with a momentum that plucked Ma's supporting leg from under him, and down the two went, with the onfloundering pair whom they had just passed stumbling over them and all sinking together in one red burial blent, like the dead at Waterloo, the red being supplied by the lurid, luxuriant pompadour of Bilge.

For a moment there was pictured a wildly scrambled cinema of arms, legs, heads, hands, elbows and other squirming portions of semi-clad human anatomy; while the crowd shrieked with excitement or bellowed with laughter, and two young women quite forgot themselves and came dancing out upon the course. It now appeared that there was one thing Bilge and Ma had forgotten to rehearse and that was getting up in case they fell down; for to rise quickly from a prostrate position while one's leg is bound to the leg of another man requires a degree of concerted action of which two average untrained humans are quite incapable. The course was now strewn with couples who had fallen down and who were unable to get up and to stay up.

In verification of that scripture which proclaims that the last shall be first, the lead-off couple, having fallen first and therefore having had the most practice in attempts to arise, were now upon their feet and charging the goal line. They too had grasped

the advantage of Ma's tactics in counting and were coming down the sward, one-twoing loudly.

"Roll, Priestley, roll!" screamed Mona.

"Roll, Addison, roll!" echoed Phyllis.

The possibilities in such a procedure became instantly apparent to Bilge, who gathered Ma to his bosom with a preparatory clasp, while the latter swung himself over with a kick that started them off with a considerable degree of centrifugal impetus. Bilge added to this as he flung over Ma, and thus, over-and-under, over-and-under, like a spinning barrel, they compassed the last ten yards to the goal and leaped up to breast the tape and collapse upon it a yard ahead of the next contestants, who had fallen again and were themselves resorting to the body-spin.

As the white tape snapped, there was an instant uproar, the mixture of cheers and protest, with the cheers eventually drowning the protest, as the judges ruled that all was fair in three-legged races that got the racers over the course.

But with all the spinning of his head, Bilge could still do arithmetic, and he got a terrible shock as he studied the writhing pair who had just rolled in behind them.

"If that's *Barracks* winning second, they've got us," he gasped. "I never thought of it before, but twenty-three and three makes twenty-six, and twenty and five only makes twenty-five."

For the two of them, though plaudits still rang in their ears, there followed a moment of awful agony.

"It's not," shouted Bilge, as identification became possible, his speech taking the form of a vocal

explosion that suggested great relief. "It's the *Sunflower* twins."

"We've won, Bilge," gulped Ma happily. - "We all have done won."

In confirmation of this fact their handlers, who had been excitedly cutting them apart, lifted the two men upon their shoulders and began a triumphant procession over the field, which the band hastily departed from its position on the side of the course to lead.

"Lemme down," protested Bilge, as soon as he could visualize the spectacle he and Ma must be making, in their abbreviated undershirts and amputated dungarees, when thus held forth to the gaze of the mixed multitude. "Lemme down and get some clothes on."

Eventually the hilarious celebrants did let Bilge and Ma down, and the *Judson* ship's company hung a blue-jacket curtain of humanity about the trampled spot upon the sod which had served as their reviving room. When the toilet of the two tired but happy athletes was complete, they repaid their *Judson* mates for this devotion by hanging the bucket, with the towel, the sponge, the bottle and the remains of lemons, upon the arm of one and incontinently deserting all to make for a friendly spreading elm beneath which Phyllis and Moron waited, both to give and to receive.

"See you at the club to-night," reminded Jew in parting, for there remained yet another chapter in this history of fifty pounds, and that night there were indeed big and significant doings at the Navy Men's Club.

To begin with, the building was packed and

It's the  
- "We-  
ers, who  
fted the  
triumph-  
d hastily  
e course  
on as he  
must be  
d ampu-  
the gaze  
and get  
let Bilge  
ny hung  
out that  
erved as  
the two  
y repaid  
aging the  
ottle and  
one and  
friendly,  
d Mona  
ded Jew,  
r chapter  
ght there  
he Naval  
ked and

jammed. There were twelve hundred men inside of it; there were twelve hundred men who were turned away because it wouldn't hold them. The officers had one wing of the gallery; the chief petty had the other; the floor was possessed by the enlisted men. Our British cousins were there, — Tommy in his khaki, the tars in their blue with linen sailor collars, the marines in their burnished brass buttons and snappy red edgings. First and foremost the enlisted man of the United States Navy was there, packing every unoccupied bench, crowding himself like putty into every crack and crevice, or festooning his long form over jutting braces, rods and struts, or perched on bits of gymnasium apparatus that had been pushed back against the wall to-night to give every possible bit of seating space.

On the stage for a time a minstrel show held forth, but presently gave way to a military pageant led by that always appealing "Spirit of '76" trio, whistling, fifeing, and drumming for liberty, and supported now by Uncle Samuel and Johannus Bull, both looking very martial, and in their turn followed by all their gallant allies, France and Italy, Belgium and Serbia, Portugal and Greece, and so on to the end of the list of the twenty-seven or more of them; with the band walloping out a medley of national airs, stressing the Marseillaise and concluding with that bi-national tune which is "America" in the U. S. A. and "God Save the King" in most of the rest of the world.

The men on the seats thumped and stamped and shouted as the lines of waving color marched and countermarched, but the climax was reached when, with the formation in two long lines that met up-

stage in the point of a V, an unmistakable American lassie came on in the garb of a Red Cross nurse escorted on the one hand by an American soldier rifle-armed, and on the other by an American sailor also rifle-armed, the one upholstered in khaki and the other in his proper blue. The Red Cross girl took position upstage where, with a single dramatic riot of color and movement, the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, the tricolors of France, Italy and Belgium, suddenly appeared intertwined above her head, with all the other national pennants and guerdons fluttering round, while still the soldier and the sailor guarded stoutly.

For a moment the music stilled. The very cheers were hushed. Then it was proven that the American bluejacket is incurably sentimental. It may have been that one touch of femininity amid all the massed manhood. It may have been the unexpressed suggestion that it is for woman that this war is being fought — to shield her, protect her and help her right to love, to virtue and to hope — that it is for her that so many flags have been unfurled, so many bosoms bared to shot and gas. On the other hand it may have been the sentiment that the Red Cross inspires, or the mere uprising of chivalry in the male heart, backed by this massing of suggestion and suggestion, of appeal to one sacred memory after another, — anyway, and however it came to pass there was silence for a time in the Men's Naval Clubhouse in this port of missing submarines.

Officers with gold stripes upon their arms were digging at their eyes, quite unashamed; hardened chief petty who would as soon be seen turning their backs to a foe as displaying emotion before the other

ratings, were doing the same thing. But no one need have considered what the enlisted man was thinking. He wasn't thinking — exactly. He was feeling — more deeply than he had ever felt before upon this subject. And they sat very still, breathing deeply, resolving deeply!

Then the band began to play, softly, unobtrusively at first, and then, slipping into a galloping, well-known tune, some voice was lifted in that absurd familiar parody about putting the Kaiser into Heligoland.

The men, after this period of suppressed emotion, leaped upon the words. With a mighty, stentorian shout they lifted them till they all but raised the glass roof of the old baths which have been transformed into this very serviceable clubhouse.

This was rather an unplanned result. It was a sort of unexpected by-product of the work of the executive officer of a mother-ship whose stage-managing ability had produced the pageant, after commandeering the talent from among the men who spend all their days hammering boiler iron or pounding sand into foundry molds or superintending lathes, or performing any one of that vast intricacy of mechanical tasks that are necessary in order to keep a flotilla of destroyers fit and fighting in the sea.

But there was, along with this unplanned result of the executive officer, the carefully planned one of Bilge and Ma; for somewhere in the middle of this program of frolic and patriotism, the American Consul had been led to a place on the stage beside an easel which supported a velvet board covered with the glittering medals to be presented to the winners

## 240 The Exploits of Bilge and Ma

of the day's events. The Consul was vastly embarrassed and as nervous as any sweet girl salutatorian on Commencement eve, but true to the traditions of his country, his tongue attached itself readily to felicitous phrases, as one by one he presented the medals to the winners.

There were several repeaters among these medal winners, but none who repeated with the shameful frequency of Bilge and Ma. One or the other of them seemed marching on or off the stage all the time. The appearance of either the one or the other, — Bilge, long, red, grinning cheerfully; Ma, dark, wiry, frightfully fussed, — was the signal for cheers and whistlings. As again and again they came, were decorated and went forth, the line of hardware lengthened on their breasts till they began to sag on the left shoulder and besought the Consul to begin to hang things on the starboard bosom, as the marine man calls a better trim. Last of all they came on as the winning team in the contest for points, to receive the purse of fifty pounds.

"You have won these medals and this handsome purse," said the handsome Consul, "mostly for exhibitions of speed. Speed is what is wanted to win this war. Speed up! Telegraph it home — speed up!"

Again an audience that seemed never to grow hoarse vociferated its appreciation of the nerve and luck of Ma and Bilge, and of the happy aptness of the counsel of the diplomat. But when they walked off, there was a delegation from the Jews awaiting them, headed by the Jew with outstretched hand.



"We are going to adopt twelve French war orphans with it," he announced with pleasant assurance.

"You are, hey!" exclaimed Bilge, with an instant hardening of his complaisant features.

"Sorry," said Ma firmly, "but we-all promised it a-ready to a couple of American war orphans."

"Yes," averred Bilge, "we have."

"A couple of American war orphans!" murmured the Jew, temporarily disconcerted by the seriousness with which this proposition was advanced. But it occurred to Spud Murphy innocently to inquire:

"What orphans?"

"Bilge and me," answered Ma gently.

"Bilge and you! What for?" demanded the Jew, waking up to his accustomed aggression.

"What for? For London," declared Bilge sententiously.

"You-all didn't think we-all was a-goin' out there and run and jump our fool heads plumb off for you-all loafers to decide what we did with this fifty pounds, did you?" inquired Ma cynically.

"We're goin' on London leave to-morrow — seven days of it — and we just naturally needed to fortify our pockets a little for the trip, so we went out and won it. So long, boys. I'll mention yore good intentions, Jew, to the King. Maybe he'll send you the D.S.O."

## VI

### LONDON LEAVE

"LORD! What we will do to that old toad," ejaculated one.

"What we will!" chuckled the other.

The whistle upon the little play-engine attached to a train of British carriages upon an Irish railway had emitted a nice, ladylike premonitory toot. The toot, however, was quite unregarded about the way of the compartment where a group of sailors from the *Judson* was bidding noisy, jocular and envious farewell to Kennedy and Ford. With some eighty pounds in their possession, the money which was pinned for safe-keeping in the pocket of Ma's blouse, he having elected himself treasurer of the pair with only a single dissenting vote.

"So long, you Bilge and Ma," sang out Dyckman, stimulated to hilarious excitement by the same occasion which had affected Abner Anderson so conversely that he was even now whispering gloomy warnings into Ma Ford's ear.

"Look out for this darned nut, Kennedy, when you get him up to London is my opinion," Anderson concluded, with a pessimistic shake of the head. "He's got the same chance to stay there a week as not get put into the Tower for high treason than have to be promoted to aid-de-kong of our little Admiral."

But the happily contented Ma felt himself

tirely competent to restrain the exuberances and eccentricities of the auburn-haired machinist's mate.

"He's as safe as Democracy with me," he asseverated, and, hailing from Texas, Ma held himself to be reasonably careful of the welfare of Democracy which, of course, he spelled with the large D, conceiving of no other sort.

"Ware the wild women, Bilge!" Bunny McIntyre was counselling sagely. "Better look up one of these Y-hut-mothers the minute you hit town and give her all your money but about two pounds, and report to her every day for counsel and advice."

"Hut-mothers!" scorned Bilge.

"Hut-mothers?" inquired Ma. "Why, Bunny, you talk like Bilge and me was a pair of bleatin' lambs. We-all ain't doughboys; we're sailors. We've took care of ourselves in every port in the world, Port Said included."

"London's different," argued Bunny seriously.

"Diff'ent? It ain't no diff'ent than what Waco is. Hello! We're shovin' off. Good-by, you-all. Take good care of the good ship *Judson* and good care of Captain Bill."

It was true that in that silent, almost ghostly fashion which European trains affect, this particular thing of rolling equipment had started. The fringe of clustering bluejackets pattered along the platform, clinging to the window, shouting final reminders of commissions to be executed and last words of warning, of admonition, and of jest until accelerated speed shook off even the most daring and persistent of them, and Bilge and Ma looked about to discover themselves entirely alone in a third-class

compartment in which regulations provide that enlisted men shall travel.

"We're on our way," gurgled the red-head, excitement lighting his blue eyes and vibrating in his voice.

"I allow 'at we are," admitted Ma, chewing gum steadily while he looked out at the streaming Irish landscape, patches of trees, flashes of roadway, the ruins of an old castle, and glimpses of the River Liffey.

It was a green, green land, and it afforded a singularly peaceful prospect with the little, black Kerry cows browsing the clover by an amber stream, white lambs gamboling, with goats nibbling, white geese strutting, and chickens speckling the hillside about white-walled, brown-thatched cottages from which lazy curls of peat smoke were rising.

"Appears like there can't be no war anywhere," Ma remarked meditatively and glanced across at Bilge; but the message of all this tranquil beauty had rather lost itself upon the machinist's mate. The song had broken into happy song, and the song just now ended in a wild, hair-raising whoop.

"Just so blamed happy I could throw myself out of the window," he explained to Ma's inquiring look. "There isn't an officer in sight. There isn't a clock. There isn't a bugle call. There isn't a Chief Petty a-going around and a-taking the life out of me by telling me to repack twenty-nine valves or plug two hundred and eleven condenser tubes. I'm on leave! For seven days I'm my own boss. I belong to the greatest country in the world. I'm going up to visit the greatest city in the world. There'll be theaters and girls and life! And something to eat besides Navy Chow."

Ma vibrated to the thrill in Bilge's voice, but philosophized after his sober, reflective fashion: "If it wasn't for you and me, I reckon, and a whole lot of other gobs on destroyers, theirs and ours, there wouldn't be nothing so much to eat in London right about now."

"You're right, old man," agreed Bilge. "They might be missing a meal once in a while if it wasn't for us. I guess that's why I feel like I do, Ma," he bubbled, "about going up to London. Why, I'm going to her like she was an old sweetheart awaiting for me. She'll be glad to see us, all right. Some little time we'll have in London, what!"

Now it so happened that any excess of optimism on Bilge's part generally evoked a corresponding pessimism or cynicism on Ma's; and this last gurgling speech of the machinist's mate easily amounted to excess.

"She will all right while our money holds out," drawled Ma. "I suppose, Bilge, you got it all figured out how she'll turn out the band for you, and how the King and Queen will come down to Euston Station to give you the freedom of the city and tell you to make your regular hang-out at Buckingham Palace, huh? That the way you feel?"

Bilge dodged the wet blanket of Ma's pessimism and chose to testify further as to the exact state of his feelings by releasing another war whoop.

"By jinks!" reproved Ma. "You're goin' shell-shock, just like Ab said you was."

"I'm not," insisted Bilge stoutly — "but only I just feels so good to be on leave that it tickles — actually tickles all over. Away down in the bottom of my boots it tickles."

Bilge stretched his long, rangy frame and broke into uproarious laughter.

"I itch!" he announced bluntly, when his laughing fit was over.

"That ain't nothin' remarkable, I guess," remarked Ma sarcastically.

"I itch to do something," explained Bilge. "I'm just so full of the old 'T-N-T' that I'm liable to blow right square up. I've got to match my strong young strength against something, Ma, or die of onger before we're fifty miles out of port."

"You better cut off a couple of boilers and steam down, is my opinion," remarked Ma dryly, viewing his friend both with disfavor and apprehension. He recognized the symptoms of a growing irresponsibility of spirit. "You'll be blowin' out the cylinder head directly."

"Tell you, Ma," proposed Bilge enthusiastically. "Let's kidnap this train. Next time it stops at one of these dinky little stations, you grab the engine and I'll pick up the whole train of cars and carry 'em off somewheres and play with 'em."

"Take 'em to London with you, maybe," suggested Ma witheringly.

"That's the idea," declared Bilge with emphasis. "Take 'em down and show 'em off in the side show at Piccadilly Circus."

"Crazier and crazier!" frowned Ma. "Piccadilly Circus ain't a regular circus, you darned fool. It's just some cross-roads."

"It isn't? Where do you get that stuff?" required Bilge, suddenly serious. "All my life I've been reading about Piccadilly Circus. I've seen Sells Brothers and Ringling and Fred Stone; I

wait, I always said to myself, wait until you've seen Piccadilly Circus."

"It's a round place, I tell you, made out of a bunch of street corners," persisted Ma. "There's Oxford Circus and a lot of others," and the Texan sailor-lad produced the map from which the night before he had divined the information which was probably full as disappointing to him as to Bilge.

"Then I'll make a circus of my own," declared Bilge, "and I'll make it right here. Good-by. I'm going out for a little walk." With the train going — nobody ever knows how fast these English trains are going, they steal along so smoothly — but with the train speeding rapidly, Bilge stepped out of the door and disappeared.

The compartments in these third-class cars, it may be explained to the American reader, open direct either upon the station platform or on to space. It was on to space that the door had opened now with Bilge, and on to space that Ma gazed, frozen with horror for one palsied instant, after which he thrust his head out and squinted back for a sight of a whirling body spinning end over end along the right of way to final collapse and confusion in a heap of old blue rags.

Instead he beheld Bilge dizzily prancing along the footboard of the car, swinging from door handle to door handle, and as he passed the doorway of each compartment, he thrust in through the open window thereof a merrily waving hand, and it was plain from the movement of his face that he shouted some gay greeting to his fellow passengers within.

"And this train doin' forty knots!" gasped Ma. "One of them handles will pull out, or a door will

swing open, or his foot will slip, and he'll get his cupola knocked off."

"Bilge! You, Bilge!" he screamed. As well as he could, he screamed to the whirlwind. Bilge could not hear him. Besides, he was having too good a time to stop in the middle of what he had heard. The sight of startled faces within the cupola and the thrill of joy as he matched his sinewy thews against the laws of gravitation and the forces of centrifugal motion, compounded an ecstasy in his bored soul.

"The idiot will get killed right at the beginning of his leave," muttered Ma, regarding death for a sailor under such conditions as doubly calamitous.

Throwing off his flat circular hat beside the hat of Bilge upon the seat, he swung out also and went chasing monkey-like along the side of the carriage.

"'Tain't so much to do," he remarked to himself, "not after riding the decks of the *Judson* in that December storm. Why, say, this is kind of like taking an evening stroll for me — for a deck man. But for Bilge, that durned machinist's mate, that used to nothin' but iron ladders, it's different."

He hurried along the footboard bent on rescue and restraint; but Bilge, having come to the end of the carriage, instead of turning back, coolly stretched his long arms and his equally long legs across the gap between the two carriages and continued on that mad way which invited death at least at every bridge and signal post that stood close enough to the roadway to threaten to sweep him off. The consternation Bilge produced among the passengers was witnessed plainly enough by Ma, as he swept past window after window, in the startled and frightened faces; but try as he would, he could not



overtake his friend until, away up by the first-class coaches, the latter had turned about because he had come upon the end of the train.

"Great, ain't it?" Bilge shrieked into Ma's ear, and clapping a hand upon the shoulder of his mate, held him fast, despite the swaying of the train.

Ma, meanwhile, was aware of a beautiful, excited face in the compartment just before them, a face on which alarm and instant resolve were painted as a white jeweled hand went up and caught at the emergency chain. Automatically the air was applied, and the train came to a sudden stop in the middle of a hayfield, with the engine driver and various guards hastily dropping off and coming back to investigate, while the face of the frightened lady appeared once more at the window, and Ma discerned a flash that it was a very beautiful face.

"Oh, oh, you dear, reckless, American boys!" she exclaimed, in tones whose richness was like music and whose culture was unmistakable.

Bilge, already sobered by the unlooked-for result of his mad prank, reddened in embarrassed silence.

"Shucks!" apologized Ma, boring one abashed toe into the cinders. "We was just havin' a little fun, your — your majesty."

It seemed to the courteous young Texan that this wonderful creature must at the very least be majesty; although at the sound of the word she laughed, a silvery, relieved peal of laughter. By this time, however, the anxious engine driver was on the scene, demanding bluntly: "'Oo applied the bryke?"

With no signs of bloody tragedy about and two

American sailors staring at him with signs of constraint in their manner, he began to suspect that he had been hoaxed. Everywhere heads were thrust out of windows. Yet the one person who should tell about pulling the emergency chain had heard the question rather absently. She was lost with admiring inspection of the American sailors, so immaculately dressed in their dark blues, so smoothly shaven and cleanly tonsured, with such excellent clear eyes and ruddy sea complexions. Neither, she reflected, was exactly handsome; in fact, the red-headed one was rather plain, but they looked so wholesome — so, so —

“You two bloomin’ Yanks — you pulled the chyne!” accused the engine driver truculently.

“Yeh! I pulled it!” confessed Ma mendaciously still chewing his cud of gum and staring at the engine driver with hard, impenetrable eye.

“Why — why,” exclaimed the lady quickly. “No! I pulled it — by — by accident.”

“It was a very grave accident, my lady,” said the engine driver, with dignity, lifting his cap. “I am very much regretted.”

Regretted is a crushing word over here. When the head of an official department has a perfectly crushing rebuke to administer to a subordinate who has failed or erred, he sends him a little note which begins: “It is very much regretted,” etc., and the reprimanded one mopes in his heart for years or mayhap commits suicide.

But the lady in the compartment did not mope. She only looked relief from her dark eyes, relief and further admiration for the sailor men. The engine driver, however, still retained his suspicion

"You two Yanks might be at the bottom of this accident, anyw'y," he decided shrewdly. "If you ply any more pranks on me, I'll 'ave the constable tyke you hoff at the next stytion. You're drunk, anyw'y."

"Intoxicated! How absurd!" reproached the lady with the eyes.

"Will you be responsible for them, Ma'am? They were running up and down on the footboard," said the guard, who had been gathering information from the other car windows.

"I shan't refuse!" declared the lady, as if accepting a challenge. "Put them right in with me."

The guard accepted the bond of those brown eyes instinctively. So did Bilge and Ma. Vastly humbled, they entered the compartment and found themselves waved to seats opposite a slender lady of medium height, dressed in some kind of simple brown suit that matched the brown of her hair and the brown, too, of her eyes, if anything could have matched them, which of course was not possible. They noted that the brown lady had red lips, perfect teeth, a rather narrow forehead and a high bridge to her aristocratic nose. She suggested a combination of force of character with extreme good humor for, with the boys sitting respectfully opposite her like bad children overawed, she gazed at their embarrassment for a moment and then broke into irrepressible laughter. She laughed so hard her eyes were closed by mirth.

"What freakish notions do pop into you sailors' heads!" she exclaimed presently.

"We weren't drunk!" protested Ma.

"Drunk? Absurd! Do not mention the word.

Why, of course not. You were merely full of spirits."

Ma exchanged a quick glance with Bilge. Was she spoofing them?

"Do you know," she remarked, "that is the most amazing thing about you Americans. An idea comes into your mind, it mends itself to you, and you just — pop off and do it. That's the way your whole American nation is going into this war — head over heels. It's rather splendid! When you hit the line with the whole of your smashing force it will crumble like the crust of a tart."

"It shore will!" declared Ma fervently. "When we us destroyers — we're destroyer men, Mr. Kennedy and me. I'm Mr. Ford of Texas."

"Charmed to meet you, I'm sure," smiled the young lady.

"You know what happened to the submarine when us destroyers struck these —" Ma remembered, choked a boast in his throat, and went on with: "They're held, the papers say."

"Indeed they are," declared the charming young woman, whose manner was perfectly frank and cordial without being familiar or patronizing. "Tell me what amazing eccentricity —"

"It's just, Ma'am, that we're going away on London leave, and we've got so fed up that when we get out like this, our own boss, for seven days we're just like to bust!"

"I understand it! I understand it perfectly," declared the young woman with another burst of her rippling laughter. "But you must be careful in London. It is full of pitfalls for eager, inexperienced young men like you."

Inexperienced! Ma liked this young woman immensely, but he could barely smother his scorn and resentment at such an implication.

"You had best report to one of the Y-huts the minute you reach town."

The Y. M. C. A. hut! There it was again.

"Excuse us, Ma'am," interposed Bilge, "but we don't intend to report to anybody. We're on leave. What's the good of being on leave if we're reporting every five minutes?"

"Oh, we rate to take care of ourselves all right," insisted Ma obdurately, although with the utmost respectfulness in his manner, whereat the charming young woman merely laughed some more and shook her head.

"Have it your way then," she agreed, "but if you get in trouble, make for the Y-hut first thing. Promise me that now, won't you?"

"If we get in trouble," postulated Ma, and was going to add, "yes"; but his stubborn pride asserted itself. "If Bilge and me gets into trouble by ourself, we generally work out by ourself," he concluded with a disarming smile.

"Pride! Pride!" warned the lady and shook a playful finger. "Pride has many a fall in London these days." Thereafter tactfully she dropped the subject.

It can be a very pleasant ride to Dublin from, let us say Mallow, and this afternoon, with that brown-eyed lady for a traveling companion, the time passed with exceeding swiftness.

"Where do you stop in London?" she inquired when, at Kingsbridge Station, Bilge and Ma had handed her, her maid and her luggage over to the

mercies of a porter, for it appeared that she was to spend the night in the Irish capital.

"At the Piccadilly."

"The Piccadilly!" exclaimed the lady in amazement. "Why, only the rich can stop there."

"We're rich — for a few days," explained Bilge.

The witching brown eyes wore a puzzled look for a moment, and it was plain that she was weighing the London prospects of these two blithe and self-satisfied young men carefully in the balance of her judgment; but presently the knit brows smoothed again.

"Oh, you Americans!" she laughed and handed them her card. "I shall be in London to-morrow," she explained. "You two gentlemen must call on me on Wednesday at five for tea."

Rather overwhelmed, the two young gentlemen blushed, stammered, nodded agreement, and were left standing with the card. The address upon it was a street in Mayfair which meant nothing particular to them. What had staggered them was something different. "Mary Bracken," they read, "Countess of Bloomfield."

"Fan me!" murmured Ma.

"The Countess of Bloomfield!" gurgled Bilge.

"Will we go?" inquired Ma.

"We will," decided Bilge emphatically. "We will."

In the early dawn of the next morning the two sailors arrived at their journey's end, and, clutching each an object which was in Americanese a grip and in Londonese a bag, made their way out into the mad scramble of Euston Station, paused on the c

to light themselves cigars, engaged the attention of a taxicab driver, mentioned the name of the Hotel Piccadilly and, behind the mask of ~~considerable~~ nervousness, reclined with all the simulations of luxurious ease until, at the tomb-like hour of seven o'clock, their vehicle drew up before the famous caravanserie. A giant figure in military dress coat of blue, with large sections of gold braid upon the shoulders, with red tabs and red facings and a wealth of burnished brass in the way of buttons, approached the cab door. Bilge's mask of ease was punctured.

"Is it an admiral?" he gasped.

"Naw!" argued Ma. "Red's an army color. Red tabs means staff officer."

"Yeh! Staff officer of the hotel," opined Bilge, recovering swiftly as the door was opened and a gilded arm reached in for the two bags. "I've met these flunkies before. Remember the Lord of Lallyskallen and the Earl of Skibberreen!"

"I remember 'em," recalled Ma with a wry smile. "Them birds sure did fool us."

"But we pinned it on 'em all the same. We've got to do the same with London."

"Yeh!" agreed Ma. "Yeh!"

They were registering now, and then they were going to their joint room where they performed a very elaborate toilet, although under the circumstances it could consist of no more than a thorough deep-sea washing of their sailor heads and their sailor hands and a retying of their sailor neckerchiefs, after which they filtered down to breakfast, and after breakfast debouched upon the street called Piccadilly.

Now probably the one idea most successfully planted beneath the veneer of careless youth American Navy discipline is that he shall appear clean and neat at all times when ashore.

"Let's go and get a shave!" proposed Ma, rubbing his jaw.

"I'll say we will," responded Bilge. "Where?"

"I've heard tell of the Savoy barber shop," remembered Ma. "The Savoy's the most American hotel in London and somethin' swell, they say."

"Us for it and that," declared Bilge with a hearty nod.

They inquired their way from Piccadilly to the Strand, and along the Strand to the Savoy and its subterranean barber shop. "What'll you order, sir?" inquired the American Barber.

"Everything!" announced Bilge complacently and luxuriantly stretched his limbs.

"Same prescription!" said Ma, as he sank into the next chair.

For more than an hour these youths, as hard-boiled as monkey wrenches, who for a year on shipboard had been handled as delicately as they handle piglets at Bethlehem, knew what it was to be bowed and fawned over, and fussed over, shaved, shampooed, massaged, vibrated, powdered, perfumed! — all in succession. When the succession of operations at last reached an end, when the elaborations and ramifications of the art tonsorial could do no more for them, the change from the pound note which each handed to the cashier was to their munificent eyes so small that they could do no less than throw it about in a barrage of extravagant tips to hairdresser, hatboy and manicure girls; after which they is



forth, shinier, cleaner-looking than before, and gazed about them with an air of superb content.

"Let's eat, Bilge," proposed Ma.

"It's only an hour or so since breakfast," demurred Bilge.

"But that breakfast was kind of skimpy."

"I'm game!" agreed Bilge, and they made their way into the Savoy restaurant which, at that hour, half-past nine, was a fairly busy place.

Our English friends never get through marvelling at the spectacle of a common sailor walking into a first-class restaurant and deporting himself as if he were accustomed to such places; but neither do they grow weary of gazing at him with friendly, admiring glances. So Bilge and Ma encountered a fairly flattering optical reception, besides which, and what was more important to them, an obsequious head waiter with sweeping French bows and an allied accent, conducted them to a table in a corner.

"Look at that!" nudged Bilge, pointing to a little brass plate on the wall above the table, which read: "*Charles Frohman's Table.*"

"He went down on the *Lusitania*," recalled Ma.

"And we been going over her grave about two times a week for fifty-two weeks," said Bilge. "They won't let us get our job out of mind, will they?"

However, at Charles Frohman's table the ham and the eggs tasted just as good as in the Hotel Piccadilly.

"Where for lunch?" inquired Bilge, as they came out.

"Jumpin' Jehosaphat! It's not lunch time yet?" objected Ma.

"It's getting along toward it," averred Bilge, catching sight of the clock on Charing Cross station. "The smell of all that chow there in Savoy kind of give me back my appetite."

"Let's git lunch at Claridge's," suggested Ma. "Claridge's is more English. I read about a crowd of fellows once in a book that had lunch at Claridge's."

"Look! There comes a circus parade."

"You got circus on the brain, man! It's just a string of omnibuses."

"Gosh!" apologized Bilge. "They're all decked up with these bright red and green signs that I thought they were animal cages. Pipe the cute conductorettes. Pipe and pile on. Let's go somewhere."

"But you don't know where they go!"

"It don't matter where we go, does it, as long as we go somewhere? We've got the time, we've got the price."

Bilge flipped the footboard and pattered up the spiral staircase to the hurricane deck, Ma following. They rode and rode and rode, losing immediately the track of where they were in the maze of swaying, bending and broken streets.

"London ain't a city. It's a sort of prairie town," decided Ma. "It's just a crowd of buildings that keep milling and milling round you till they plumb stampeded like a herd of cattle, and I don't know where I'm at nor nothin'."

Bilge was studying street signs. "Well, what do you think of that?" he demanded. "Oxford Street quit like a dog, and High Holborn crollin' right along in its track. Eastcheap! N

gate! Threadneedle Street — where the Bank of England is. Why, say, I keep meeting old friends all the time.”

“I read about all these streets myself in books, one time and another,” reminisced Ma contentedly.

“I haven’t never seen you read a book,” recalled Bilge, and scanned his friend with bland, cross-examining eye.

“I read a lot of ’em one summer when I was herding sheep up in New Mexico — all English: ‘The Hidden Hand’, ‘The Street of Blood’, ‘The Bridge of Sighs’, ‘Leave Hope Behind’, ‘Her Little Heart’ — all good books too.”

“Uh-huh, they sound interesting,” admitted Bilge, with just a shade of a suspicion of lowering his off eyelid derisively, a bit of facial play which, if Ma caught, he did not correctly interpret.

“They was all about streets like this,” burred the Texan. “And the Thames! I want to see the Thames! Say, there’s a sign that points to London Bridge right now. I don’t blame the limeys for being a little cocky about their old town, honest, I don’t. It ain’t a city, really. It ain’t laid out half as well as Waco, and it’s bigger, though Waco is growin’, but there sure is one crowd of people here.”

“What’s those towers there?” inquired Bilge of a neighbor in front of him.

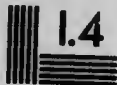
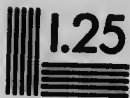
“The Tower of London.”

“Why, sure; I forgot. Ma, the Tower of London is in London, ain’t it? Why, Ma, we’re right here at the beginnings of history, you might say. Everything I ever learned in English history happened in the Tower of London, or else at York or



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



1.5

1.6

1.8

2.0

2.2

2.5

2.8

3.2

3.6

4.0

4.5

5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10.0

11.2

12.5

14.3

16.0

18.0

20.0

22.5

25.0

28.2

31.5



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

Hastings, or on a barge coming from Blackfriars to the Tower. Let's get off and see the Tower."

Bilge's excitement was considerable.

Two minutes later they were crossing the bridge over the vast moat and being awed by the teeth of the portcullis, for many a century poised and waiting to keep a foe without or hold a prisoner within. The boys were conducted first through that pile of frowning stone called the bloody tower, shown to them the room in which the small princes were smothered, shown the chamber where Sir Walter Raleigh had for twelve years been imprisoned, and they gazed at the narrow bit of wall on which for twelve years he took his daily walks.

"If he stood it twelve years, I reckon we can stand another six months on a destroyer, if the war lasts that long," commented Bilge.

"I reckon," conceded Bilge, gazing much impressed at the window through which a certain Archbishop was said to have bestowed a blessing upon a certain nobleman bound for the block.

They moved in a dream out of the bloody tower and round and up into the great white tower of William the Conqueror, where they passed from room to room of that magnificent collection of armor and armor which is housed there. Ma, naturally, lingered longest before the horses and the armor, the models and the weapons of knightly offense and defense. But he shuddered before the collection of bits.

"Man, what's the sense of ruinin' a horse's mouth that-a-way?" he demanded. "Look's like a horse can't wear that bit once and commit suicide."

"He wouldn't think about his mouth because

at that spur," and Bilge pointed to a thing like a poniard, four inches long, and made to wear on the heel of a cavalier's boot.

"Lead me away from it," demanded Ma. "A horse is the noblest friend of man, and all I say about these people that went to the block from this tower is if they all rode horses with this kind of gear on 'em, they got what they deserved."

The boys were halted next by the spectacle of the block on which Lord Lovat, the Scotchman, went to his death, and by the story of how his own cool demeanor made the headsman nervous and disconcerted him into bungling his job, in evidence of which were pointed out to them the three cuts upon the block instead of one bold gash that should have been there. Along with this gruesome relic were exhibited to them the instruments of torture, the thumb-cracker, the back-breaker and the model of the rack upon which it was once thought necessary to stretch a witness, man or woman, and prepare them for testimony by slowly disjuncting their limbs, reviving them if they fainted and bringing them by successive agonies to a state where truth must triumph on their tongues.

"Sort of a German world, back in them times, what!" exclaimed Ma. "It makes me kind of sick."

"Me, too," conceded Bilge.

From this they went out and stood upon the spot where had been erected the block on which Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard, and others of the queens and the pretended queens of England had died. To get their minds properly saturated with this gruesome atmosphere they even tipped the war-

den slightly and were taken into the little chamber which Macaulay has called the saddest spot in the world, and there viewed the moldering slabs beneath which so many headless queens lie buried. There too they read with awe upon the plates of brass that list of thirty-four names of those who had paid the penalty of hopes or aspirations without courage or faith or weakness or crime by dying under the ax, and who, because their blood was noble or their achievements immortal, had their bodies admitted to this sacrosanct spot.

"I'm awful glad I was born in Texas," confessed Ma, when they got outside.

"Which way is Claridge's?" demanded Bilge.  
"I've got an awful appetite."

Claridge's was far off, but a taxicab annihilated the distance, and the two were soon in its spacious dining room. The general color effect was one of white and reds. The hangings and the carpets were white. The napery was white, stiff and abundant, while the silver sparkled obtrusively. The attendants moved noiselessly, bowed respectfully, and served expertly.

"Isn't it different?" inquired Bilge.

"Different from what?"

"Mess time in that old bundle of junk, the U. S. S. *Destroyer Judson*."

"It sure is," admitted Ma. "Supposing the Japanese gang was to see us now. Suppose Captain B. B. Shaw came in and found us here. Jumping Jehu! phat — Look!"

A very tall man, straight as an arrow, in the form of an admiral of the United States Navy, stood in the company of his aide and two British officers.



with the headwaiter moving grandly on before, was being conducted to a table beyond them. The admiral's beard was sparse and grizzled; his eyes were dark and carried a twinkle in them.

"Sims!" the two boys whispered in a single breath and instinctively pushed back their chairs and stood at attention.

The admiral's keen eye picked them up instantly. He noted their well-set-up figures; his approving glance took in the neatness of their appearance and that fine strain of discipline which had brought them instantly to attention as he drew near. Turning from his party he came directly to them, spoke to them cordially, inquired their names, their ship, how long they had been in London, whether they were having a good time, and if they wanted anything. Then with a smile of hearty good-will he turned to his own table.

"Can you see a limey admiral doing that?" inquired Bilge, sinking into his seat with a flutter.

"Easy as I can see two limey jacks lunching at Claridge's," chuckled Ma.

"Ours is the greatest navy in the world, what!" inquired the auburn-locked machinist's mate with a slight gulp in his throat.

"It shore is," agreed the boson's mate with emphasis.

Luncheon disposed of, the two devoted themselves again and assiduously to sight-seeing. They paraded with the throngs upon the Strand. They gazed in the shop windows of Regent Street. They trailed through the Mall to Bird Cage Walk and marvelled at the synchronized activities of the men on sentry-go before Buckingham Palace, — men

who trailed their rifles or ported or shouldered them, or strode their prescribed number of paces on their clicked heels, about-faced and marched them back again, all in fairly exact unison, though widely separated from each other's sight by that lofty parapet fence which encloses the huge, rectangular parade grounds.

They wandered through Whitehall, gazed at the grimy old ministry buildings, and stood transfixed by the gorgeous spectacle of the famous Horse Guards, mounted and standing in platoon in the yard, in the brilliant scarlet and tinsel of their uniforms, the pride of their nodding plumes, the richness of their equestrian trappings, and the rotund and sleekly groomed beauty of their imposing black horses.

"Not that those guys are licking any German," said Ma, sitting there and being gawped at!" criticised Bilge tersely.

"Naw! I don't exactly get 'em," confessed Bilge, whereat a new voice was heard between the shoulders of the two friends, a voice bubbling with an earnest desire to impart useful information.

"Not having any president like us, only a sovereign prime minister that they wish on themselves at international interviews, the British have got to have a crown and a palace and a tower and Horse Guards and all that to kind of satisfy the eye. It's the outward and visible sign of the mysterious unity of the British nation."

Bilge and Ma turned and gazed. These words of wisdom and profundity had flowed from the lips of a man beside them who was in the uniform of the Royal Navy, an unrated man with the red stripes of the engine room about his left shoulder.

"It's a good line, kid," observed Ma patronizingly. "It's a good line of conversation, but where do you-all get it?"

The sailor man flushed. "I used to be a principal of a high school before I enlisted," he explained, almost as if it were a thing to be ashamed of.

"And you enlisted in the black-gang," commented Bilge. "Well, good for you, bo. How long've you been in?"

"Eleven months."

"How old?"

"Twenty-six."

"You don't look it. String along, kid. We're just knocking around."

"I reckon," philosophized Ma, "there's brains enough just in the enlisted men of our navy to make a government out of."

"Yeh!" opined Bilge dryly. "I could be the President and you could be the Vice."

"You're the biggest vice I got," retorted Ma. "Besides, all I want is just to be Secretary of the Navy for one term. Just one term!"

"What for, Ma?" kidded Bilge.

"I got my reasons," affirmed Ma and fell on moody silence, whereat Bilge laughed inwardly, for he knew that his shipmate meditated some profound revenge that he could never hope to get.

"Thanks! I can't string along now," said the schoolmaster. "I've got a date over at the Eagle Hut."

"Eagle Hut? What's that?"

"It's the greatest Y-hut in the world. Good eats, good sleeps, good music, place to write letters; fellows from all the fronts to chin with, buzz, buzz,

buzz, lots of women there waiting on you — real women, you know — ladies, countesses, duchesses all that sort of thing.”

The Y. M. C. A. again. Bilge and Ma smiled their sweet, superior smile.

“That’s all right, I reckon, for men that don’t know how to take care of themselves,” patronized Ma, “but as for me and Bilge, we-all are stopping at the Piccadilly.”

“The Piccadilly! That takes a lot of money.”

“We got a lot of money,” admitted Bilge and Ma, not too modestly.

“Well, so long then,” replied the schoolmaster. “Come round to the hut if you get in any sort of trouble.”

“Trouble, huh!” laughed Bilge and Ma. They had been in London ten hours already and had not seen the sign of trouble. The notion that the town was full of pitfalls for self-reliant young men who knew how to take care of themselves was absurd. Jauntily they waved the schoolmaster adieu and gave themselves once more up to the intoxicating whirl of the greatest city’s crowds.

They saw many sights. They heard many sounds. Most moving experience of all, they stood at Charing Cross Station and saw the wounded coming in, pale, drawn faces, bandaged, broken frames of men with the mud of Flanders still upon their clothes, with the smell of blood about them, and the very glint of battle yet in their eyes.

It seemed quite scandalous that this appeal of their emotions should have made them hungry, they fancied that it did, and though the hour was early, went off to Gatti’s to dine.

"We've eaten up half our meat coupons the first day," discovered Bilge in some alarm.

"Anyway," remarked Ma, stroking his waist line complaisantly, "it's the first time I've had what you might call a real 'nough to eat since I filled me up on calf tee-bones down at Uncle John Mean's Y-Six ranch in Texas."

"The first for me," confessed Bilge, "since the last big feed mother give me in Brooklyn. Not that the Navy don't feed all right, you understand."

"Oh, it feeds all right," agreed Ma, "but the Navy is running a war, not a restaurant. It feeds you something to fight on. Our mothers used to feed us something to eat on."

"Anyway, I've had enough," admitted Bilge. "I don't never want to look food in the face again till to-morrow morning."

Thereafter they rose and took themselves to the theater, their first real theater since York was placed out of bounds, and they laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks over the antics of "The Bing Boys on Broadway."

"Old Broadway!" sighed Bilge, when they emerged.

"Ol' Broadway!" agreed Ma, with a sadly reminiscent note in his voice, as together they groped their way back to the Piccadilly through that dank darkness which, since the days of the air-raids, turned the night streets of London into abysmal vaults with the tiny red lamps of sputtering taxicabs glistening like animal eyes in subterranean chambers, through a gloom that at no time appears so impenetrable and hopeless as in the fifteen minutes when the theaters are discharging their early-gathered throngs.

Thus the morning and the evening were the first day of the sojourn of Bilge and Ma in London, and the morning and the evening of the next day were like unto it, until somewhere round five o'clock this second afternoon, when Ma hove to on a corner of Trafalgar Square, footsore and weary, and upon his simple face the air of having made a startling discovery. He was lonely.

"I never saw so many friendly-lookin' people, and I never felt so lonesome in all my life before," murmured to himself as, shifting drearily to the other leg, he gazed disconsolate into the throng.

"Lonesome 'ole, 'in't it?" piped a voice in the Texan's surprised ear, and Ma found himself gazing into a pair of pale-blue eyes, framed in an anemic face, the natural complexion of which had been heightened with the assistance of the rouge powder. Her lips, however, appeared naturally red to Ma's untutored judgment, and they parted over slightly irregular teeth in a smile that was half cheerful and half woebegone. There was an insinuating quality in the voice and an appalling wistfulness about the pretty mouth with the unbeautiful teeth.

"I'm just mopin' around myself, kid, so lonesome I could cry me bloomin' heyes out," said the girl snuggling rather close in that intimacy which the crowd forces upon individuals. "Me father done in France," she added sadly, by way of explanation of her own disconsolate state. "We've got to carry on though, 'aven't we?" And she bravely wiped a tear.

"Poor little kiddo!" sympathized Ma, for though the face somehow did not look young, he argued from the shortness of her skirts and the fox-tail

wavy blond hair falling a little way between the shoulders, that she was only a child.

"Y'were lonesome, weren't y', pal?" she demanded impulsively.

"I was kind of thinking of home and sister," admitted Ma, and so the conversation began. It had been going on some time when Bilge, who had fared on down the street, came coursing back in search of his friend.

"Hello!" Bilge exclaimed a trifle rudely. "Where's she come from?"

"I don't know," laughed Ma quite happily. "All at once she was here. Mighty nice little thing! Cheerful. All kinds of trouble too."

The girl, at the approach of Bilge, had drawn back a trifle shyly, leaving the two friends together and alone for a moment.

"Her father's dead in France," Ma explained — "mother works in a munitions factory; one brother just took by the draft and one just turned out of the army useless with varicose veins from too much pullin' guns through mud."

"Quite a family history you be gatherin'," commented Bilge, a trifle cynically.

"Kind of hard up, I guess," went Ma, as if paving the way for something.

"Why don't she go to work in munitions herself, instead of parading the streets?" inquired Bilge suspiciously.

"She's too young. They don't take 'em till they're full sixteen."

"Full sixteen! That girl's twenty if she's a

"Why, no, she's not," declared Ma in disgust. "Such hard-hearted stupidity. Look at her hair.

It's still kind of flaxy yet. It'll be brown when she's grown up."

"Flaxy! It's bleached. Don't you see it's dark around the roots."

"It's turning dark," argued Ma. "Besides, look at her skirts."

"Look at her legs, I say," persisted Bilge. "You can't tell nothing about how old a woman is by the length of her skirts these days, whether she's nineteen or nineteen or ninety. Look at this girl's calves. They're not the swellin' calves of budding youth. They're got muscles in 'em. The girl's an acrobat or a dancer or something like that. How much do you give her?" he demanded abruptly, as unmasking Ma's guilty secret.

"A couple of pounds," answered Ma defiantly.

"Of your money?"

"Of our money."

"Say! You hand over my share of the roll right now," directed Bilge. "When you begin to pass good money over to Janes with silk —"

"They're not silk!" declared Ma, rather taken aback. "They just —"

But the little woman had apparently made up her mind that the colloquy between friends had gone on long enough with her left out of it, or that it was not going on right. Anyway, she turned from her parent gazing up the street and advanced with simple frankness.

"And this is your friend, Mr. Kennedy, that you was tellin' me about. 'E seems a nice young man, don't 'e?" she remarked and cooed engagingly.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to record, considering the susceptibility to female blandishment



Bilge, that when the little lady had turned the full barrage of her blue eyes and smiling lips on the tall machinist's mate and added to this the pressure of her small hand appealing upon his arm, his hard heart softened instantly. He smiled and admitted that he was Mr. Kennedy of the United States Navy.

"My name is 'Ortense,'" she explained modestly. "Meet me friend, won't you, Mr. Kennedy," and from nowhere at all appeared suddenly beside them a brunette edition of Hortense who was introduced as Kytie.

Katie's dark eyes were attractive but her mouth was pretty but small, and the lower lip sagged weakly. Yet her smile was cordial, and instantly appropriating Bilge as her allotment she began to chatter entertainingly in a cockney dialect that was new to him on the lips of a girl, and sprinkled through with compliments for his appearance and for his navy. The spell thus cast was not so powerful, however, that Bilge did not recall what it was that had brought him back scouting along the Strand for his foot-weary friend.

"Here, Ma!" he said, "I been scraping acquaintance with a discharged Tommy. Most interesting line of dope on the front that you ever heard. He's selling papers right over here at Charing Cross. Come across." They went, the girls tagging along, assuming, not greatly to Bilge's surprise though somewhat to his embarrassment, that they now belonged to the party.

Bilge's discharged Tommy proved a hearty-looking soul, florid of face and full of figure, wearing a discharge badge right enough and explaining that shrapnel in the legs had put him out of the fighting,

although his legs appeared now to serve him quite as the legs of other people. He welcomed Ma with enthusiasm, took the tagging female kittens as a matter of course, and proceeded to do his utmost to extend the same true welcome of a British soldier to Ma that he had previously tendered to Bilge; and all the while selling his papers industriously.

He was eager to know about the American Navy and the boys answered his questions at length but discreetly. He played subtly upon their vanity and reciprocated volubly with stories of the fighting front in France; for it is rather characteristic of our jack-tar, with his fondness for a scrap, that he sighs for a close-up of the battle line in France.

The eloquent and stalwart newsboy, who might have been twenty-five years of age and weighed around two hundred pounds, had many stories to tell. His climax, modestly and embarrassing, reached, was the tale of how he had himself captured a German machine gun from an advance position and carried it off bodily, leaving the gun crew *hors du combat* behind him.

"Since that they calls me the 'Ooker in our Battalion, and 'Ooker, 'Ooker Bill, everybody calls me till the rest of me name is in the limbo."

"Kennedy and Ford's our names," said Ma, proffering his hand and thereby approving the person and the friendship of Mr. Hooker Bill.

"I s'y," exclaimed Hooker Bill, and an idea seemed to strike him with solid force. "Will you tyke a little walk round to my 'ouse and 'ave a cup o' tea with me—brewed by a 'and that's made many a cup in the trenches with the shells whistling over'ead?"

"I allow, Mr. Hooker Bill," and Ma began to frame a demurrer. But Hooker Bill would not list to demurrers. He was a whole-hearted, persuasive, pervasive sort of person.

"Hours is but a 'umble British 'ome," he went on volubly and politely, insinuatingly politely, "but the 'ospitality of it is welcome to our fighting Yankee cousins. Will you do that much to cement a new acquaintance? It's only a step."

Hooker Bill's bullet head was thrust forward, and there was a kind of uncouth sincerity in the expression of his red face and the appeal of his watery blue eyes. To refuse an invitation so kindly and generously meant would have argued a callousness of which neither Bilge nor Ma in their present state were capable.

"I reckon we-all could come," decided Ma.

"We'd be glad to, in fact," averred Bilge.

The ladies, to whom, by the way, the Hooker had been duly presented, though it is possible they did not meet quite as strangers, also assumed that they had been invited and assured the hospitably minded newsdealer that they would also be pleased to drink his tea.

"When mother comes 'ome from work in Woolwich, next week-end," gulped the Hooker happily, "and 'ears that we've entertained two Yankee sailors for tea in our humble 'ome, she'll be prouder nor the queen."

And all the while he was leading them across the Strand, crying his papers as he walked and thriftily selling the last of them while Bilge and Ma, Hortense and Katie, were still being piloted through what was to the sailors a bewildering maze of streets

that grew meaner or more cluttered with huckster wagons and wholesalers' trucks until, without by means realizing where they were or how they come to reach the dark passage in which they stood they were at the front of the door of the Hooker lodgings, with the Hooker himself fumbling for key, and with the two girls clinging fast and confidently, Hortense to the arm of Ma and Katie to the sinewy hand of Bilge.

"This is democracy, all right," whispered the machinist's mate to the boson's. "To-morrow time we will be taking tea with a countess."

"Yep," recalled Ma, though not exactly pleased to be drawn even for a moment from gazing into the blue, entrancing eyes of Hortense.

Bilge, however, as they entered a stuffy combination of parlor and dining room, had his attention drawn again in some unaccountable way to the fact that the girls were both wearing silk stockings and rather dainty footwear and a question thrust itself into his mind. His face, his eyes, something about his manner must have suggested the nature of his thoughts, for the Hooker, quick as a flash to note every passing mood of his guests, laughed and pointed to the girls.

"Hit's the munition worker's money," he chuckled. "Hevery factory girl in Hengland dresses loike a lady now. Ye could 'ardly tell 'em from a duchess."

At this Katie laughed merrily and flipped about on one heel with a movement that to Bilge was somehow reminiscent of musical comedy; but he liked Katie all the better for a bit of style. He liked her better yet when she took his hand and

held it comfortably while she sat beside him. This was, by American standards, a considerable degree of freedom upon short acquaintance, but Bilge knew that the European way was different, — for had he not seen it, as he walked the streets of London? Anyway, it was the more welcome because of the mighty loneliness which had begun to possess his soul as it had already possessed the soul of Ma.

“’Ere’s the bloomin’ tea!” announced the Hooker merrily, after a surprisingly short interval, and came proudly forth from a sort of kitchenette bearing a battered brass tray on which were cakes, a jar of the inevitable jam, some thinly greased slices of bread and two cups of tea. These he carefully and ostentatiously bestowed upon the sailors. Immediately they proffered them to the girls.

“No-o-o, y’don’t,” commanded their host with canny sharpness. “International guests first in this ’ouse.”

“Ladies first in our country,” responded Ma gallantly, still proffering his tea to the blue eyes.

“Besides, Hi gives these chits of girls tea out of a different pot,” explained the Hooker, with an indulgent smile. “They can’t drink fightin’ man’s drink like you and me.” And from the kitchenette he brought forth two other cups of tea for the girls, and sat down to a third for himself.

“Heat ’earty,” the Hooker insisted, his own mouth full of bread and jam. “Food ain’t so plenty like what it was in London before these ’Uns of the sea got to nippin’ round quite so lively, but it would be less nor what it is, if it weren’t for you bloomin’ Yanks, God bless ye!”

Lifting his cup of tea, Hooker Bill drank deep

and long to the Yankees, as attested by his eyes upon them over the rim of his cup. They too drank down and long.

"Some people likes their grog," rumbled on the host, his voice throaty and bready, "but I see the bcys wasn't that kind. The day of alcohol is done in Hameriky, I tells people, and I never hoffer the first off to sailors."

Bilge and Ma looked their appreciation of the compliment as witnessing still further to the simple-heartedness of their host.

"I'll take some more hot water in my cup," suggested Bilge, manipulating his tongue reflectively. "You English make your tea stronger than they do in Ireland."

"It's my hown way," laughed the Hooker, offering good fellowship. "Yes, tyke some more 'ot water and some more milk and sugar too, and wash it down drink down clean like."

"It shore is strong," admitted Ma, making a face which, however, was not necessarily significant since, being a Texan, he regarded coffee as the non-intoxicating beverage truly worthy of human consumption, and therefore viewed tea with suspicion and dislike. However, he too yielded to the importunings of his host and the dictates of courtesy and permitted his cup to be filled again from the international guests' special brew, and eventually drank it. It was while drinking this second cup that Ma detected a certain drowsiness stealing upon him.

"What — I beg your pardon, Miss Horter, what was that you was sayin'?" and he struggled to get into his mind through a mist of fog

seemed suddenly rising round him the meaning of the last words she had spoken.

"You said you would tyke us to the the-eyeter," the blue-eyed one repeated.

"Theater? Oh, yes, yes, Miss — Miss," answered Ma thickly. "But you'll just naturally have to let me lay down an' git a little sleep first," he explained rather surprisingly. "I sure got to pillow my ol' head on something and pillow it good and quick."

The nearest thing that in anywise resembled a pillow, and that not very completely, was the demure shoulder of the supposedly tender, young Miss Hortense, and upon that shoulder Ma's head sank down after a wobble or two and without another word.

'Ortense looked across at Bilge and smiled.

"We're powerful sleepy, Miss Hortense, both of us, we are for a fact," averred Bilge, yawning heavily and himself too overcome with sudden drowsiness to be shocked by the uncouthness of Ma's behavior. "We must 'a' stayed up nearly all night last night to get so sleepy as what we are."

And Bilge, forgetting Katie by his side and her dark curling ringlets with which he had been boldly toying while she drank her tea, disengaged the hand which had wandered affectionately about her neck, crossed his arms upon the table, lowered his face upon his hands and, his long, lurid pompadour all but steeping in the dregs of his tea, he too slept the sleep of utter forgetfulness.

"Miss — Miss Hortense!" murmured Ma, waking painfully, stretching his arms, rubbing his thick-lidded eyes which he had almost to pry apart, and

then staring about him at unfamiliar surroundings which he presently identified as a gloomy and apparently seldom used passageway leading to a corner somewhere beyond from which emanated a variety of noisome odors. The bed on which his slumber had been concluded he also recognized as a roughly joined paving stones which floored the passageway into the roof of which his eyes were staring.

"Bilge!" he called. "Bilge!" At first there was no answer, and then a sleepy grunt issued from somewhere behind. Ma sat contemplating the gloom and eventually his eyes made out the prostrate figure of his comrade, plastered close against the wall to be out of the way of passing footsteps, just as Ma had evidently been until he turned over and sat in the center of the corridor and began stupidly to recollect himself.

Ma's tongue was thick and furred. "Spitting cotton!" he remarked, observing his symptoms. His pain throbbed in his temples, and his eyes did not focus readily.

"That tea! I'm off of tea for the rest of my life," he reproached, and then, as his thinking processes geared up a few more cells of his brain, a new idea struck him with great violence.

"Doped!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Doped!" And instantly his hand went to his breast. Finding there no comfortable bulkiness where the communal wallet had reposed, his hand trembling groped its way inside and made sure the pocket was empty, absolutely empty.

"Robbed!" he muttered disconsolately. "Robbed! Didn't even leave me the makin's."



But when he tried to piece out the final movements in the last bit of action his memory recalled, the result was patchwork with yawning gaps in the film of action. Perhaps he might have given the money to Bilge, or Bilge might have taken it when he fell asleep, for Ma could remember now that he did fall asleep on Miss Hortense's shoulder. Accordingly he crawled, surprised to discover with what pain his limbs responded to his will, to the side of Bilge, felt him over and examined those few pockets which the navy regulations provide for the garments of a sailor. Like his own, those pockets were empty.

"Bilge!" he shouted, shaking the slumberer violently. "Wake up! We're robbed! Do you-all get that? Robbed!"

He shouted the words directly into the flaring, freckled ear of the machinist's mate, and the latter sat up abruptly, staring at Ma with bloodshot eyes.

"You sucker!" he accused, when the truth had dawned on him. "You sucker!" and he seized Ma by the shoulders and shook him violently.

Ma, in a smother of resentment, shook him in return, and thus the two mates shook each other into wakefulness and stood gloomily scowling at themselves and the blank walls about them.

"Our money! Our money's gone, and we haven't hardly seen London at all yet," murmured Bilge with a ghastly groan.

"Our leave ain't but just begun," recalled Ma sadly.

Black confusion and the shame of utter humiliation settled in a dense cloud upon two proud natures.

For once neither had the spirit left to seek to incriminate the other.

"It's lucky our return tickets were at the hotel. We been sheared like a couple of lambs," confessed Bilge.

"The old — old army game!" mumbled Ma, and was silent, kicking disconsolately at the pavement with his toe.

Some reflective, remorseful minutes passed. Each thought of the same thing. Neither mentioned it.

"Where are we?" demanded Bilge presently, and sniffed with a fastidious nose the malodorous zephyrs wafted in from the dank, cobble-stone court that appeared just beyond them. "Smells like a tripe-factory," he decided in deep disgust.

"The question is, where was we?" retorted Ma sententiously.

"In the siren's den," murmured Bilge, in tones of self-reproach. "We fell for them, and they let us lay."

"Yeh!" admitted Ma. "They let us lay out here on the cobbles all night."

"But they trimmed us proper, and they trimmed us first," recalled Bilge mournfully.

"She had such a wonderful look in her eyes," reflected Ma, with a sorrowful shake of the head.

"Katie's touch was so gentle," sighed Bilge.

"So gentle I don't suppose you even felt it when she pinched your last ten-shillin' note," opined Bilge sarcastically. "We ain't got nothing left but our identification tags. It's a wonder they didn't take them for souvenirs."

"The girls never robbed us," declared Bilge.

loyally. "They were just nice little girls like they pretended to be. The Hooker, hook him, probably doped them too. Ma," and Bilge clutched his friend tightly by the shoulders, "we've got to find where those girls are and rescue them. We've got to rescue 'em if it takes our whole leave time to do it."

Ma was thoughtful for a moment, thoughtful and doubtful, until there rose before his mind a picture of short, blond hair, of a little childish figure of a woman, with blue, full eyes and a wistful light in them — a little girl whose father had died in France; then doubt flitted. Resolution came, resolution and the framing of a noble purpose.

"You're plumb right, Bilge," he declared heartily.

"We got to. Now the first start-off —"

"The first start-off," interrupted Bilge, "is to take this ten-shilling note I've just found floating round between my undershirt and me — explaining why the Hooker missed it. The first start-off is to get some breakfast, for I figure we've slept here on these stones right through the night."

"Feels like I'd slept on 'em a thousand years," grumbled Ma, rubbing his back.

"The first start-off," re-emphasized Bilge, "is to get some breakfast and a shave and get ourselves to looking like enlisted men had ought to look before anybody sees us masqueradin' as a pair of tramps."

"No," objected Ma stubbornly. "The first thing is to notice just where we are and dope out how we got to here from where we was. They figure on us gettin' up and kind of wandering round stupid and groggy till we get lost and can't tell where we slept."

That Hooker never dragged us far with his shrapnel legs, you know that."

"Not too bad, that reasoning," admitted Bilge "but I'm not hardly equal to anything till I get some ham and eggs and coffee down in my boiler room."

"You held on watch twelve hours in that December storm without a bite to eat."

"That was for Uncle Sam — for duty's sake," explained Bilge, stiffening.

"This is for beauty's sake," argued Ma, with sadness and a smirk combined. "If a man's a real man there isn't nothing can make him endure more than putting himself out for a lady in distress. She had the nicest, flaxiest hair, that little Hortense, and the innocentest smile."

"Dog-gone you, Ma!" exclaimed Bilge, and with resolution forming quickly on his face, turned back along the alley to a dark, uncertain stair.

"They must 'a' brought us down from some place there, don't you reckon?" suggested Ma.

"I guess so," speculated Bilge and groped his way to the head of the stair, where he stopped and sniffed. "Nópe! We're wrong," he decided. "The smell's different. This whole kennel is filled with the smell of printing ink and leather — pre-rotten leather too — something like that. There wasn't nothing of the sort in that other house. It was kind of sweet-smelling, if you can imagine the smell of one of these rabbit hutches."

"It would be sort of cute of that guy if he carried us down-stairs and across the court and placed us in this alley so we'd think we come from up here," suggested Ma.

"That's so," concluded Bilge. "If it wasn't for our heads being muddled, we'd 'a' thought of that before."

They retraced their steps, inspected the court, which appeared to be in the center of a block and served as a delivering yard into which trucks, carts and drays, horse-driven or motor-impelled, came and went continuously, giving or receiving various smelly sorts of traffic for several small manufacturing establishments abutting on one side, while the other side was given over to lodging houses of the cheaper sort.

"It looks sort of hopeless," commented Ma.

"We've got to do a little deducin'," decided Bilge. "I deduce first off that it isn't any one of these factory houses on this side. I deduce next off that it isn't any of the houses that open directly on this court, because no room in 'em could have smelled sweet. I deduce number three that these two tunnels here at each corner run through to another court and some more houses, and that it's one of those houses where we were trimmed."

"Proceedin' by empirical —"

Bilge turned quickly and looked at Ma in a startled way.

"I read a book once about how Edison invented," explained Ma sheepishly.

"Yes," affirmed Bilge, "proceeding empirically, I'm going to try one of those tunnels, and if it isn't the right one, I'm going to try the other."

The two ventured off along one of them. Later they tried the other. Eventually, having proceeded empirically for the matter of an hour, empiricism on an empty stomach being but a slow and tedious sci-

entific method, Bilge and Ma, after stumbling over garbage heaps, being spit at by cats, stared at by frowsy servant girls, bit at by dogs, and scowled and growled at by various and sundry male human beings of unsavory appearance, found themselves completely baffled. But still they persevered, hour after hour, until they had, it seemed, prowled through every passage of every lodging house and through every darksome alley, court and cavern of the entire district.

"Think of those girls!" Ma would say, when Bilge showed signs of giving up.

"D'you know," confessed Bilge at length, "I begin somehow to doubt those girls, now that I get more daylight into my brain."

"You ought to have considerable daylight in your eyes if you're ever going to get it in, seeing that it's twelve o'clock by that church steeple yonder."

"Let's eat," proposed Bilge. "By jinks, Ma, we must eat."

They spied out a cheap-looking hole-in-the-wall and ate sparingly, Fletcherizing their food and Hooverizing their money. They bore themselves with outward composure but inwardly were greatly subdued and not at all as the proud and self-satisfied young men who yesterday morning had registered at the Hotel Piccadilly.

"Let's get a shave," proposed Ma.

They got a shave and seized the facilities of a barber shop to get themselves brushed and shined in something like their pristine glory of personal appearance. This luxury would have reduced their ten shillings to two, but that providentially Ma had discovered a ten-shilling note floating round

the region beneath his shirt and tickling him as the other had tickled Bilge.

"Do you know, Ma," said Bilge, contemplating this pesky white note with its printing in red upon it, "this sort of proves to me that those girls were on the square. They planted these notes on us after the other fellow robbed us, just so's we wouldn't be completely broke. We've got to —"

"There! Hi! There he is. Stop, thief! Stop, you durned wallet-pincher!"

Ma, who had delivered himself of this burst of oratory, was off excitedly across the street, tearing his way through the weaving crowd and making for a large man with a bowler hat who dodged as rapidly onward as the massing, eddying human being in the street would permit.

Bilge followed Ma, not joining in the outcry, but making no doubt as to its meaning and eventually recognizing the bowler hat also. Ma gained its immediate vicinity first and over the heads of the crowd struck out impatiently with his long hand straight down upon the hat, which immediately went crushing down over the ears and eyes of the wearer, leaving him temporarily blindfolded and setting up a tremendous clamor in the crowd.

"Dope me, will you, and rob me?" exulted Ma, seizing the blinded man by the wrist and looking about for a policeman.

"Got you, my bird, all right!" gloated Bilge, seizing the other wrist, but instantly something misgave him as he noted the texture of the coatsleeve and the softness of the hand he gripped.

"Wot's up, Yanks?" demanded one of a pair of

typical London Bobbies, whose appearance was so instant as to seem providential.

"This bloke doped us and robbed us of fifty-two pounds," declared Ma indignantly. Bilge, however, in that moment of doubt and irresolution which had come to him, had permitted the prisoner to wrench his hand free. Immediately he tore off the bowler with an indignant jerk, and both Bilge and Ma fell back in consternation as they observed that their captive was no more the Hooker than he was the Premier of England. He was a strong, irate, florid young man, wearing upon his coat lapel the bronze badge of the Honorable Constabulary of the City of London. The faces of the Bobbies hardened instantly.

"We-all have made a mistake," explained Ma very much abashed. "We-all beg your humble pardon, sir. We just seen your back, sir, and we took you for a man that robbed us last night of fifty pounds."

"Robbed you?" expostulated the wrathful young man. "Robbed you? Do you think I look like a robber?"

"We thought you did, but you don't," stammered Bilge. "We apologize, sir; but we've been robbed — right here in London too, that my mate and me have been fighting for for more than a year on a destroyer, and I guess we were kind of sore and hasty, sir. I hope you'll excuse us."

"We haven't hurt you none, I reckon," urged Ma, "except your hat, and we'll git you a new one."

It may have been the signs of deep contrition on the young men's faces, it may have been the uniforms they wore or the kind of embarrassed dignity with



which they bore themselves, or that remark of Bilge's about fighting for London on a destroyer, or perhaps it was that the young man whom they had chosen for assault and battery was one of the most notoriously good-natured young fellows in London. Anyway, the signs of wrath upon his face vanished speedily, giving way to a curious kind of personal interest in the cause of the young sailors themselves. "Robbed, do you mean to say? Robbed! Why, that is an outrage."

"Yes, sir," affirmed Ma solemnly. "We been robbed all right, mister."

"It is an outrage," he declared again. "Officers, look into it. I accept these young men's apologies. Their attack upon me was neither pleasant nor complimentary, but it did no serious harm. No doubt it will be a warning to them against overhaste in future. I have heard that you American soldiers and sailors are rash," he added, by way of a parting shot, and hastily escaped from the undesirable publicity he was enjoying, contemplating his hat ruefully and looking about for a shop where he might have it replaced.

The faces of Ma and Bilge actually sagged for a moment with amazement at the ease with which they had been let out of a most embarrassing situation; but the stern-featured Bobbies still remained with them as indicating that they were not yet out of the situation after all.

"Come away out of here!" the helmeted ones directed, as wishing themselves to escape the crowd while they deliberated; or perhaps they wished seclusion in which to hear the story of the robbery, although Bilge and Ma were instinctively resolved

not to tell that story, since each felt that it reflected too little credit on their own astuteness.

However, the crowd buzzed along behind unpleasantly curious at the spectacle of Yankee sailors escorted by London Bobbies. As usual, too, half the men in the crowd were in uniform, and they recognized in these American sailors not only fighting kindred but folk to whom in a peculiar sense hospitality and protection was due.

"Wot's it all about, myte," demanded a huge British jack-tar, who immediately ranged himself protectingly beside Ma, unceremoniously urging the Bobby off who had been there.

At the same moment a jaunty Australian, with wide rolling hat and his red sunburned face, made overtures to Bilge upon the other side, crowding between him and his escorting policeman and desiring to know of the said policeman what idea was gnawing at his vitals. An instant later two Lancashire Tommies in khaki fell in behind as if to afford protection from the rear, while from up the street three coal-black Barbadians, also in the khaki uniform of the British Tommy and carrying swagger sticks, came marching smartly down. They paused, viewed the situation over, noted the sight of distinguished comrades in distress, and decided that it called for their intervention also. Snapping at the head of the procession and led off up the Strand, with curious hundreds following.

Thus were Bilge and Ma encompassed and surrounded, front, flank and rear, though such a guard of honor, however well meant, only made them more conspicuous as before, conspicuity be-

the particular thing which they twain at this moment sought to avoid.

"Ain't this shameful?" muttered Ma. "I know that somewhere there's a moving-picture man making a fillum of this to take back to the Naval Club. We're disgraced, we're robbed, and we haven't seen London yet — not half of it."

"Darned near all of London is seeing us, that's one consolation," perspired Bilge. "It's awful."

"I can stand it all but these niggers," confessed Ma. "If they ever heard of it in Waco, me taking a nigger's wind like this, and kind of proud of it too! Gee, it's a great war!"

"The question is, what are we going to do?" groaned Bilge. "Are we under arrest or what? We're ruined. Supposing we were to meet the admiral now. If we had only gone to the Y-hut like I wanted to."

"Like you wanted to, you dog-goned streak of yellow!" exploded Ma wrathfully.

But just then another helmeted figure hove in sight to relieve the perplexity which obviously possessed the first two Bobbies as to whether they should hold or set free this pair of rashly unfortunate young men. Under this third helmet appeared, rather surprisingly, the face of a woman. The garments were those of a woman also, though the color was dark blue and the cut military, while long black military boots completed the costume and helped out the illusion of the helmet.

"A woman cop!" ejaculated Bilge.

"I've read about 'em," remembered Ma.

The Bobbies engaged in whispered consultation with the representative of the several thousand vol-

unteer policewomen of the city of London and its environs who have wrought so tactfully and effectively to give police protection to the military strangers within the gates of that city. The policewoman nodded at the story, turned shrewd, kindly eyes upon the boys, and said: "Very well, you may come with me now."

The police fell away, the guard of honor melted away, the very crowd seemed to fall away at the hint of a woman's wish as the lady, coming between Bilge and Ma, thrust a hand through an arm of each quite comfortably. To Ma this registered as ignominy subjoined below ignominy. To Bilge it was but another phase in what was becoming a wild and fantastic nightmare. Each looked at each over the rim of the policewoman's helmet, and neither would any more have resisted her wish than another of the thousands of enlisted men who had proven so amenable to the handling of the policewomen in moods where the ordinary male creation of the patent-leather helmet and chin-strap could have provoked nothing but a fight.

"Hit's all right, Buddy," whispered the black Barbadian in Ma's ear.

"Buddy!" exploded Ma.

"She'll take you to Eagle Hut," beamed the black man.

"I don't want to go to the Y-hut like this," protested Bilge under his breath to Ma. "We — we were not arrested, are we?" he inquired when the progress of a block had fairly put the acutest part of the experience before them.

"Arrested?      a dear fellows! Certainly not," and the policewoman laughed cheerily. "I'm o

using the cloak of my office and sex to lead you out of an embarrassing situation."

"Thank you, Ma'am, very much," murmured Ma. Bilge also murmured.

"See! There it is, right across the way."

The policewoman tactfully dropped back and left the two boys standing on the curb, looking across to the low hut which covered some thousands of square feet of floor space on one of the most treasured spots in London.

Groups of enlisted men in the uniforms of the land and sea forces of Great Britain and the United States appeared sitting before the door, reading or chatting or smoking. Other groups came and went, coming eagerly, going contentedly. The strumming of a piano floated out to them, punctured by the crack of billiard balls.

"We don't have to go in," exclaimed Bilge, looking about him in surprise. "The lady cop has gone."

"I sort of want to," said Ma.

"Don't care if I do, either," decided Bilge.

The two sailors crossed the open space and entered, not knowing that the lady policeman, from the shadow of a doorway, watched their movements with a knowing smile. They paused and looked about them at a long room, equipped as a sort of lobby, with chairs, tables and counters, soldiers and sailors sitting about singly or in groups, or lining up before a canteen window. This first room opened on other rooms and alcoves, some with reading tables, lounges and games, and one of them with rows and rows of dining tables.

There was an atmosphere of the good old U. S. A.

about the place. Neither man could have told what it consisted, yet each sensed the smell and the flavor of back home about the place. Something like a lump came up in Bilge's throat. They had but barely stepped out of London with its thousand years of history behind it, with its centuries of buildings and streets and institutions; and here they stood in a new pine shack that was redolent of the new world entirely.

"Seems as if we just stepped back across the pond," remarked Bilge, with a funny kind of jump in his voice.

"Yey!" admitted Ma, speaking fiercely to get past a hard spot that was forming in his own throat.

A man in the Y uniform recognized them as strangers and advanced with open hand and smiling face.

"Anything in particular I can do for you?"

"Have you got the Waco papers?" inquired Ma, demanding the most impossible and the most desirable thing he could recall upon the spur of the moment.

"Waco? I'm afraid not," smiled the man, "—Dallas! How would that suit you? There was a man round here with a Dallas paper not half an hour ago."

Leaving them standing, the amiable gentleman with the red triangle on his collar departed to return presently, waving triumphantly a somewhat rumpled paper.

"Thank you, sir," gasped Ma, grateful as a dog. "*The Dallas News!* What do you think of that?" And he sank into the nearest chair.

"The cotton looks fine, but it seems like it's got

to be dry again out in West Texas," he announced, after an absorbed quarter of an hour.

"The Dodgers are dodging another pennant," complained Bilge in disgust, flinging down his *Daily Eagle*. "Let's go and eat. It's supper time. We got a few shillings left, and beans never smelt so good to me in all my life."

"If my ol' nose don't deceive me, I smell hot-cakes," declared Ma. "Let's project c t to the dinin' room."

"Hot-cakes! That's German propaganda to talk of hot-cakes to a Yankee sailor," reproved Bilge.

But there actually were hot-cakes, and they two ricocheted from beans to hot-cakes and back again until the ghost of Mr. Hoover stood before them.

"The best meal I've ate in London," decided Ma, with a sigh.

"I wish we had 'a' found this place sooner," murmured Bilge.

"Better go now and make sure of a bed, hadn't we, while we've got the price?" suggested the humble Ma.

They did this and had occasion to rejoice in their forethought when a few minutes later they saw a sign go up, announcing that all beds for the night were taken.

"Appears like there's something doing in here," remarked Ma, pointing his steps toward a rotunda-like place packed with chairs and equipped with a stage.

"Elsie Janis! What do you know about that?" gasped Bilge, when he read the announcement on the bulletin board. "No moving picture either. Her!"

And it was she, the charming, sparkling, radiant, gallant Elsie herself, fresh from a long tour of entertaining the soldiers of Uncle Sam in France. And here she entertained again, queening it regal over her packed circle of admirers, convulsing them with laughter at her stories and her imitations, and sweeping their heart-strings with her songs, but always to touch them at last on the universal funny bone once more.

Panting with her effort, beaming good nature and happiness at the applause her artistry had won, she responded to call after call and finally was tempted into the aisle to be included in a flashlight photograph of the audience. Here they posed her on a chair so close to Bilge that her gleaming, radiant personality overflowed and gilded his red hair and florid cheeks like a sunburst. For an instant he was dazed and awed. Then a wave of unaccountable audacity surged over him.

"Here, Miss Janis!" he said, and offered his flat round hat with the U. S. S. *Judson* lettered on the front of it. The actress caught the idea instantly, flipped the cap on her head, giving it a jaunty lurch to starboard, and glanced over at Bilge with roguish laughing eyes, whereat the machinist's mate was thrilled beyond all thrills he had ever experienced while Ma was inspired to audacity upon his own part and whipped off his sailor neckerchief to pose it up also, so that the amiable Elsie was photographed in Bilge's flat hat and with Ma's black sailor neckerchief flowing round her neck and fluttering on her slender, palpitating bosom.

The effect of this breezy incident was to whipe out the last ash of humiliation from their but recent



perturbed brows and leave them that night the two happiest and proudest sailors in London. And more was coming, though the two neither recognized nor expected it, and were making their way out of the hall with the conscience of the Texan nagging at him somewhat as follows:

"Bilge! We forgot about them girls. We haven't rescued 'em yet. We got to go right out and do it."

"I tell you I'm getting more and more doubtful about those girls," meditated Bilge. "I think we were just a couple of —"

"You didn't come out to tea," complained a reproachful voice behind them, reproachful and yet somehow cheery and inspiring.

Bilge and Ma turned quickly to greet the Countess of Bloomfield. Her dress was not brown this time to match her eyes, but the eyes themselves were still dark and vivacious, and she looked altogether as bewitching as ever. Both boys flushed deeply.

"We — we —" stammered Bilge.

"We got tangled up where we couldn't, Ma'am," explained Ma.

"Oh, no matter," said the lady quickly, as she noted their embarrassment. "We did miss you, though. However, I am glad you took my advice and found Eagle Hut. You're looking very nicely, too. I have charge of the nightly programmes. The half of every month. You seemed to be enjoying the one to-night."

"You saw us?" inquired Bilge eagerly.

"And I saw what your hat and neckerchief were doing," laughed the Countess. "I wasn't a bit surprised at your effrontery either. Arthur! Here,

Arthur!" and she beckoned a heavy-shouldered young man toward her. "I want you to see these two fine young sailor chaps I met on the train."

A very amiable young man sallied up, extended his hand, halted, opened his eyes widely, exclaimed "Oh, by jove!" and backed off to adjust his eye-glass.

"Fan me, Ma!" murmured Bilge. "Fan me!"

"The very chaps!" declared the young man, turning and looking at his sister with comic seriousness, while Bilge and Ma curled and crinkled round the edges in the searing heat of fresh confusion. "These are the young hoodlums I told you about, Mary, that wanted to arrest me for a common, vulgar highwayman. Bally rotten of them, don't you think?" And Brother Arthur sagged at the knee while he went off into a roar of laughter. For a moment the eyes of the Countess sparkled with mirth, and then she became all sympathy, though Bilge and Ma had half a notion it was more sympathy.

"Robbed!" she exclaimed concernedly. "I'll tell me about it."

The Countess drew them into a corner and bade them sit down with her. Arthur also sat down but listened beamingly and not sympathetically, as if being robbed were a jolly lark; and when his innate chivalry broke out in his confessed desire to go forth even yet and rescue the two young girls, Brother Arthur broke out again in hilarity, guffaws and beat upon the floor with his cane to relieve his spasm of pure joy. "I say!" he groaned. "Oh, I say!"

His sister looked at him reprovingly, but to

boys exclaimed with unveiled irony: "Girls! They must have been grandmothers, both of 'em — in crime at least. Don't think of the shameless creatures again. It was just a plot to rob you from the first, and yo'' are lucky to be well rid of them at a cost of fifty pounds."

Bilge and Ma exchanged glances. This was their most humiliating moment, and they could not escape the feeling that a part at least of the fire of scorn in the battery of those dark eyes was for their own lamblike innocence. Yet before they had time to feel anything like a personal hurt, the Countess had spoken again, addressing herself to her brother.

"Arthur!" she exclaimed. "I am going to take these boys home with me, just to show them how London ought to feel toward them — how London does feel toward them. They are in danger of losing their good time just because — just because they have been treated too abominably."

"By Jove, do!" said Brother Arthur emphatically. "I'd rather like some Yankee chaps running over the house, and these'll do as well as any. In fact, better; I rather like 'em, you know."

"You cert'ny have got a forgivin' disposition, Mister — Mister Arthur," said Ma. "But we-all couldn't accept your invitation, lady. We're kind of sore on ourselves for getting robbed and all that."

"But you wouldn't hurt me, would you?" And the brown eyes of the Countess took ruthless advantage of the two tender-hearted sailors by looking as solemn and pained as if they were about to shed a tear.

"No'm, we certainly would not," said Bilge, speaking up quickly.

Within half an hour Bilge and Ma had been introduced to the husband of the Countess of Bloomfield, and were much puzzled in computing whether the husband of a countess was a count or not, although they noticed that the servants called him "My Lord," while Arthur hailed him baldly Bloomfield.

The two mates slept that night in a giant four-poster bed in a giant room hung with tapestries and floored with rugs an inch or more in thickness. They breakfasted next morning in this same room in state. Later the Countess entertained them at tennis. They found her home a huge, rambling place with grounds, grounds, grounds, and a park and wood with the Thames at the back of the latter.

The place abounded in children, those of the Countess and some that seemed to be borrowed from the wives of soldiers at the front. The home was also a haven for wounded and invalided British officers, who cropped out at every turn all over the place. Bilge and Ma were in great demand for the entertainment of the children and for the entertainment of these officers, and were themselves vastly thrilled by having white, clean, jolly children clambering over them, and by hearing from the gallant men epic stories of the fighting front, while little modestly told hero-tales of how this Captain or that Major earned the decoration that appeared so proudly upon his breast, although never by any persuasion would the wearer himself tell how he got it or listen to the telling by another.

But Bilge and Ma were by no means to be intermingled with children or invalids. Every day Broton Arthur or the Countess herself took them out

sight-seeing trips, and always late in the evening they were dropped down at Eagle Hut for dinner and thrilling hours of what the schoolmaster-sailor had called buzz-buzz with their enlisted-men allies and comrades from every zone of war. And after they had shot a game of pool and enjoyed the evening's entertainment, there was Brother Arthur or the Countess to take them home again.

"Pretty soft, what!" Bilge used to murmur.

"Yeh!" confessed Ma. "You was right, Bilge; London was glad to see us after all."

Each day was a month in length and put farther and farther behind them the memory of that terrible chagrin which grouped round their bitter experiences of the second day. From regretting this incident, they came gradually to look upon it as natural and even necessary. Certainly it had proved the opening doorway into their present blissful state, and though the knowledge of the circumstances punctured their pride, they came even to look upon this puncturing as a blessing in disguise. The time was possibly coming when they would boast of it. Already its blackness blended and lost itself in a crowd of rose-hued recollections, and when Saturday night came their week in London bulked itself in memory as one long and glorious triumph, a series of actions and engagements in which their gallantry had been conspicuous.

"What we did to that old town!" chuckled Bilge, as he composed himself for slumber in a corner of their third-class compartment.

"Yeh! What we did!" yawned Ma, with a feeling of peace and content toward all the allied world, Hooker Bill, even, not seriously exempted from his

300      **The Exploits of Bilge and Ma**

general amnesty. And then, in the honesty of his soul he added:

“But at that, I don’t exactly figure that we got away with London the way I thought we was goin’ to.”

“Neither do I,” admitted Bilge. “You can’t get away with London. It’s too big.”

of his

we got  
s goin'

an't get

